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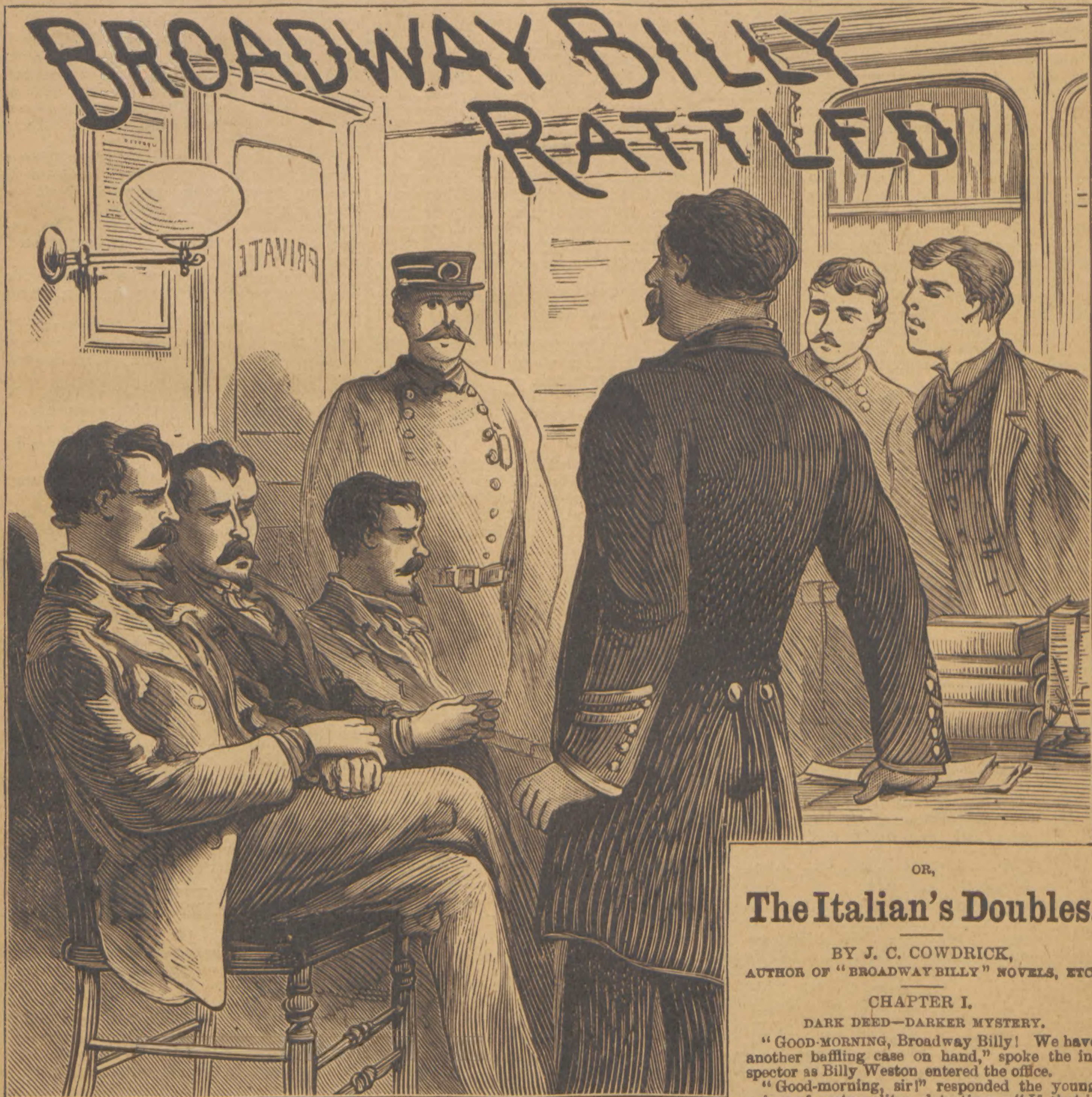
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"THREE OF A KIND!" OBSERVED SILENT SETH, CALMLY.

OR,

The Italian's Doubles.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DARK DEED—DARKER MYSTERY.

"GOOD-MORNING, Broadway Billy! We have another baffling case on hand," spoke the inspector as Billy Weston entered the office.

"Good-morning, sir!" responded the young prince of metropolitan detectives. "If that is so, why have you sent for me? I cannot be of

much use to you if it's a puzzler, though I'm willing to do what I can."

"We know what you can do, Billy, so never mind that kind of talk. You have done some remarkable pieces of detective work, and have made for yourself a record to be proud of. Come, we'll step in and see the superintendent and talk it over with him."

"Got your bloodhound, have you?" the superintendent greeted; as they entered.

"Yes, here he is, ready for the trail. Will you start him upon the scent? or are you too busy?"

"Well, a mysterious crime has been done, Billy, and as many of our best men are engaged upon other matters we have no one at liberty to put on this latest case that we care to trust, so shall put it in your hands."

"You may count on me, to the best of my ability, sir."

"Yes, I know you are always ready, my boy. Lend me your attention, then, and I'll give you the points."

The inspector and Billy had taken seats, and the superintendent faced around in his revolving chair and proceeded to give the young professional the particulars of an interesting and baffling mystery.

"This matter is one of a puzzling nature, Billy," he began. "Yesterday a gentleman came here to put a case in our hands. His name was Charles Hayzley, and he stated that his life was in danger and said he wanted police protection. He would not tell his story in full, then, and now he is dead!"

"He did, however, tell us something. He was, he said, in possession of a secret, and it was on account of that his life was in danger. Asked to name the person from whom he anticipated an attempt on his life, he mentioned one Paul Vienett. Further than this he would disclose nothing, but insisted that an able detective should be sent to his house this morning, to whom he would reveal all. This was a precaution for safety, he said."

"So, this morning at an appointed hour, a detective went there and the door was opened to him by a woman. She proved to be the housekeeper. Mr. Hayzley was asked for, and the woman said he was not up yet. Stated that he did sometimes sleep late, and that she never called him unless previously ordered to awaken him at a certain time. My man insisted upon seeing him, saying he had an appointment with him for that hour, so the woman went up to call her master while the detective waited in the room below."

"The detective heard her rap several times, each time louder than before, but there was no response, and finally, after a particularly loud knock, the woman called down to him, in a tone of alarm, to come up at once, as she feared that something must be the matter with Mr. Hayzley. And so thought the detective, too, for the knocking had been almost loud enough to awaken the dead, and he hastened up to learn what was wrong. The door was locked, inside, but together they forced it, after some effort, and then was the truth discovered. Mr. Hayzley had been foully and cruelly murdered."

"The body was lying on the floor, partly disrobed, and the red mark of a garrote was plainly seen on the neck. The windows were secured, inside, and it did not appear how the assassin had gained entrance, much less how he had gone out again and left the room locked as it was. The garrote, however, was gone, showing that it had been a murder, and that the murderer had made good his escape, taking his weapon with him. And another thing: Mr. Hayzley was a powerfully-made man, and the one who overcame him must have been little short of a giant in strength. There was little evidence of a struggle, however,

and it seemed that the victim may have been taken by surprise from behind."

"Well, my man told the woman to say nothing till he could come and report to me, and I and the inspector went back with him. We found things just as he had reported, and as you have heard. There seemed to be no clue whatever. We could not find a thing upon which to build a theory. We notified the coroner and the prosecutor, and they will take charge, but the case will be kept as quiet as possible till we have a chance to work upon it. It may leak out, however, and get into the evening papers, and after that it will be public property. So, if you want to get in your work before the reporters swarm down upon that house, you had better do so at once, for swarm they will. There is the case."

"What about the man Vienett?" Billy asked.

"Just what I thought your question would be. Why, he is a gentleman, living in a quiet way with his family on a fashionable street—here is the address; and you may be sure we hunted him out immediately. He never knew Mr. Hayzley, never heard of such a person, and was at home all last evening and all night. So, it seems he is out of the matter, even though Mr. Hayzley did bring his name into question. Yet, he is the only man of that name in the city, so far as I can learn. I tell you, my lad, here is a barrel of mystery, and if you can sift it out you will do well. You will be working with Wedgley, on the case, till some other men can come into it and help, and I hope you will score another success. Do your best, anyhow, and keep me posted as you go along. That is all, I guess; you can finish your talk with the inspector. Good-morning."

The superintendent turned again to his desk, and the interview with him was at an end.

Billy followed the inspector out into the office of the latter, where they talked the case over at some length.

"Well, you have heard what the case is," the inspector remarked; "what do you think about it? What is your first impression?"

"I agree with you that it must have been murder," Billy answered. "Suicide seems to be out of the question, under the circumstances. An impossibility. Do you think that housekeeper is entirely innocent?"

"Oh, yes; she is not in it. Wedgley is a shrewd fellow, and he says her actions were natural throughout."

"And yet some women can play a part to perfection, when they make up their minds to do it. If she is in it, then the mystery is not so great. But, we'll begin by holding her innocent."

"What made you think of suicide in connection with the case?"

"That is a question always raised, you know. Then, this may have been what Mr. Hayzley wanted the detective to find when he came at the appointed time."

"Not a bad point to raise; but, we all agree that it was murder, and that suicide is out of the question. That garrote was twisted till it must almost have cut the man's head off."

"A case of murder. Now, here are one or two things to be remembered respecting the matter: Mr. Hayzley had told you, or the superintendent, that his life was in danger on account of a secret he held. He was undoubtedly watched when he came here. And, it may be, somehow, his request to have a detective sent to him this morning was found out, and, in order that he might not tell what he knew, the person or persons interested made haste to put him out of the way. In spite of appearances, I do not yet exonerate this Paul Vienett."

"You come to our way of thinking exactly, Billy. As the superintendent remarked—

he is the only man of that name in the city—I mean the one whose address you have. Still, it was our object to let him think we accepted his story and that all suspicion was allayed. We did not let him know Mr. Hayzley had accused him of design against his life."

"A good idea. If innocent, he need not know it, if guilty, he knows well enough the game you are playing, so it matters little—that is, he will think he sees your hand. If he does not, fully, it may lead to his making some move to find out what the police really know and what they only suspect. I will give attention to Mr. Paul Vienett immediately. Perhaps he has never heard of me and my team, and if not, so much the better."

When Billy took his leave it was to return at once to his own office, where Happy Harry and Silent Seth were eagerly awaiting his coming.

"Well," asked Harry, as soon as Billy entered the door, "what is the news, boss? Has the super got a new case for us to bend our back to? I feel a degree o' fever comin' on."

"Yes, a new case," answered Billy, "and about as mysterious a one as we ever took hold of, too, I think. Can you tell me how a man was murdered in his room, with a garrote, and the murderer leave the doors and windows locked inside when he made his escape?"

"Christopher Columbia!" cried Harry leaping to his feet. "The fever has jumped clear up to raging in one pop! Don't ye see my eyeballs glisten with the sooper-nashunal light? Tell us about it, boss, before Silent Seth has a fit of suppressed quereecosity!"

"Seth does not appear to be half so eager as somebody else," said Billy, in aggravating reply.

"But he is, though," Harry urged. "Tell him all about it, boss, before ye see him drop on the floor at yer feet in one fell swoop with a dull thud."

"There, there, Harry; that will do. If you have got it as bad as that I will not keep you in suspense a minute longer. Sit down here, both of you, and take in all I have to say."

It was Billy's way, telling his young aides all the particulars of every case he took hold of, in order that they might have a full understanding of it in all its bearings and so be the better armed to take advantage of anything that came up in their way.

They listened attentively to the end.

"Here's business to be done!" cried Happy Harry. "Where are you, Seth? Get a hustle on you, now, for we are in it up to our necks. The jeebeeb is on a jam-boree, and we have got a bigger jag of mystery aboard than we are likely to carry if we don't brace up under it. Say nothin', now, if ye love me, McGinnis!"

Harry might have carried his play further, but just then the door opened and a stranger entered the office, and asked:

"Are you Mr. Weston, sir?"

"I am," Billy assured.

"Glad I have found you in. My name is Paul Vienett, and I want to engage your service in a matter of some importance."

CHAPTER II.

INNOCENCE? OR DECEPTION?

SUCH an announcement created no little astonishment in that office, though Broadway Billy did not betray by act or look anything of what he felt.

Neither did Silent Seth, who remained as stoical as an Indian; but Happy Harry had to turn around and put the brakes on hard in order not to let out one of his pet exclamations.

He and Seth retired immediately to their

end of the room, where they had a couple of chairs for their exclusive use, while Billy said to the prospective client, in his usual easy and gentlemanly way—that pleasing manner that had won for him so many friends:

"Please be seated, sir, and let me hear your story. If the case is anything in my line, I may be willing to take hold of it for you."

"Thank you," the gentleman responded, seating himself. "It is a matter that has suddenly sprung into alarming magnitude, though it is no new one to me, as I am about to disclose."

"My name, as I said, is Paul Vientet, and although an Italian by birth I am an American in training and education, having been brought to this country by an uncle when I was a very small lad. I was so young that I can only faintly remember something of the voyage like a dim dream."

"This uncle I speak of was wealthy, and was my mother's brother. My mother died at the time of my birth, and my uncle and his wife took charge of me and were to me the same as parents. My father, I have inferred from what my uncle and aunt let fall regarding him, was not a parent to be proud of. They were ever very reticent respecting him."

"My mother died about a year after her marriage, a year that had been no pleasurable one, and so I was the only child. When my uncle came here to New York he went into business with his fortune, and by the time I was a young man he had almost doubled it. He gave me an interest with him, when I came of age, and at his death left everything to me."

"I married an American lady, and finding that my business did not prosper so well after my uncle's death as before, finally retired, and since then have been living on the interest of my wealth, which is sufficient for all wants. I tell you my story thus fully so that you may have a knowledge of me to begin with. And now I will come to the matter in point, laying the case before you just as it is, holding nothing back."

Broadway Billy was impressed with the man's sincerity of manner, and felt that his story was true, thus far.

"I have been aware, for some time," the client resumed, "as I before intimated, or rather asserted, that this matter which has now become important was a fact not to be disregarded, and yet I have put off paying serious attention to it before. Now, however, it has become not only important but dangerous, and something has got to be done. And this is what has brought me to you—to engage your service in clearing up the mystery and bringing the truth to light; for, I know you are an able detective."

"For some time I have known that there is a man in this city who resembles me very much in looks, and I have suspected him more than once of making use of my name. In fact, I know he has done so, and in ways not very creditable to the name, either. I have been hoping to meet him, and have taken some pains to put myself in the way of meeting him, but have not been successful. Now, however, the matter has come to that point where this fellow has got to be hunted out and forced to come forth and make known his intentions. This morning, on his account as I suspect, I came very near to being arrested for murder!"

"Ha! It does appear to be serious, sir."

"And it is serious, too. Now, Mr. Weston, can you undertake to find this fellow and force him to come out and show himself for what he is? I do not care to have such a suspicion knocking at my door, I can assure you."

"No, I should think it would not be very pleasant, sir. But, suppose you tell me more about the matter. Who has been murdered? and what was the circumstance which

turned suspicion upon you? Telling me all you can, you may put into my hands a clue that will lead to the murderer's arrest."

"I will tell you everything I can, but I have no doubt the police authorities could tell you a great deal more, if you seek information from them. The murdered man was one Charles Hayzley, a person I never heard of in my life till this day. I had no idea what was coming when the detectives asked me if I knew such a man. They came to my house and asked to see me, and inquired whether I knew Mr. Charles Hayzley. I told them I did not. Then they informed me that he had been mysteriously murdered, and said a certain slight circumstance had connected my name with his in a suspicious way."

"But they did not explain?"

"No. They asked me where I was last night, and I proved to their satisfaction that I had been at home all the evening and all night, and they went away apparently satisfied; but, if they were satisfied, I am not; I want to know just what is back of all this, and I want you to ascertain for me. Now, do you find it a case that you can take hold of?"

"Yes, I can take hold of it, and will, sir. You have never seen this man who looks like you, I understand you to say."

"Never."

"Can you give me any clue to finding him?"

"None. He has appeared at the club of which I am a member, but only once or twice."

"And what club is that?"

Its name and place were mentioned, Billy making note of them.

"Now, Mr. Vientet," he asked, "have you an enemy who might be interested in such a plot as this to work you ill?"

"Not that I am aware of; and yet this person certainly cannot be my friend. If I have an enemy, I do not know him."

"Perhaps your wife—"

"Impossible; and, I prefer that her name be not mentioned in this connection. She never had an enemy, I am sure, and I had no rival for her hand. I think this will be enough."

"It is. Now, have you any suspicion who this mysterious personage can be who has been using your name?"

"I have not, sir, not the slightest. I am all in the dark. Had you heard about the murder?"

"I had."

"Then I brought you no news, it appears. Maybe you were already interested in the matter."

The man put the question in more the form of a positive guess that such was the case, and Billy had no object in making any denial of the matter.

"Yes, I already had the case in hand," he responded.

Their eyes met.

Billy threw all his power of penetration into the searching look he gave the man, but Mr. Vientet never flinched under the close scrutiny.

"It may be, then," the man observed, "that you have knowledge about the affair which I have not, and that you know why the police suspected me and came to me as soon as the crime was discovered."

"You guess aright, sir."

Billy spoke with steady deliberation, studying the man's face and manner well all the time.

"Have you any objection to telling me?" was quietly asked.

"The secret does not belong to me, sir, but to the police," Billy made reply.

"Then you are working with the police?"

"Yes."

"Good. I am glad of that. You will in that way have the advantage of anything they may learn, and be able to work the more

in my interest. Do you understand my meaning?"

"Your words are plain enough, sir."

"By working in my interest, I mean that you will be the better able to get proof against the man who did the deed, and so clear my good name of the terrible insinuation. It is no trifling matter for a man of keen sensibilities to be almost accused of murder."

"Have no fear that I will not work in your interest," Billy gave assurance. "I have reason to believe you have told me the truth, and I will put forth every effort to solve the riddle. May I inquire your address?"

It was correctly given.

"Did the police tell you how Mr. Hayzley was killed?"

"They did not."

"The weapon used was the deadly garrote. It was in experienced hands, too, quite evidently, for there was little sign of a struggle in the room, though Mr. Hayzley was a powerful man."

"The garrote!"

"You know, then, some one who is handy with that weapon?"

"My uncle used to regard that weapon with a feeling of horror, and his manner greatly impressed me."

"He never said *why* he had that horror of it?"

"I once inquired, and his answer was—'Do not ask me, do not ask me!'"

Billy drummed with his fingers upon a corner of the desk while his thoughts were busy.

"I am going to tell you, Mr. Vientet," he presently spoke, "why the police were so prompt in descending upon you after the discovery."

"You cannot please me better, Mr. Weston."

"Mr. Hayzley went to the police no later than yesterday, asking their protection, declaring that his life was in danger owing to a secret he held. And, when asked who it was that menaced him, he named—*you*."

"Wonderful! And I never knew the man—had never heard of him! Mr. Weston, what does all this mean? You must solve the problem, you must clear me of the terrible suspicion. My means are at your command; go into the case with your whole heart, regardless of expense. Do your best to bring the truth to light."

CHAPTER III.

MR. JONES—NOT GREAT JONES.

WHEN the conversation was finally ended and the man had taken his leave, Happy Harry came forward from his place.

"Boss," he addressed his chief, "I wish you would feel of the top of my head, if you will. But, be careful about it; don't press on too hard, you know; press soft and gentle like."

"What for, Harry?" Billy asked, his eyes twinkling.

"I want to know whether my soft-spot ever grewed shut, or whether it ain't spreadin' and gettin' softer."

Billy had to laugh, seeing how serious Harry was about the absurd request he made.

"Why, what makes you think it never closed, Harry?" he asked.

"'Cause, if the softness ain't in the shell it must be inside. I have been trying to make up my mind something about this fellow that was here, but I can't fetch it."

"If you take that as indicating a softening of the brain, Harry, I am afraid I am in the same fix. I do not know whether I understand him or not. Seems to me he was thoroughly in earnest in all he said, yet, there is a doubt. What think you Silent Seth?"

Seth roused out of deep thought and came forward.

"I think the man is innocent, and that he told a straight story," he declared.

"Have made up your mind to that, have you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, my vote is with yours, although some doubt might be raised. Where does your strongest doubt lie, Harry?"

"Just the suspicion that maybe he has come here with this pretty story to throw dust into your eyes, boss, that's where. If he knew Hayzley went to the police, he must have known you had taken the case."

"That is the point, Harry. Was he in earnest? or was he playing? We will give him the benefit of the doubt for the present, anyhow."

They talked on, discussing the mysterious case fully, and finally Billy was about to take his leave to pay a visit to the Hayzley residence when the door opened again and another person entered.

This time the caller was a man about fifty years of age, a short, thick man with a beard sprinkled with gray. He was well clad in a business suit, and looked like a prosperous, wide-awake merchant.

"Is this Broadway Billy?" he asked in a terse manner.

"Yes, sir," Billy answered, in the fewest words as possible.

"I want you to do a job for me."

"What is it?"

"I want you to look into the character of a certain man, and let me know just what he is."

"You suspect him of a crime?"

"No; but I want to know something about him."

"What's your object in it? I must know that, sir."

"You're confounded particular, seems to me. What's that your business, so long as you get your pay?"

"I guess you have come to the wrong place, sir," said Billy, quietly. "We do not undertake any contemptible spy work here; I deal only in criminal matters, in the interest of law and justice."

"Plague it, young man, ain't all detectives spies?"

"No, sir; and you are away off the track if you think so. I do not think I am the man you want, Mr.—?"

"My name is Henry Jones, sir. I'm a merchant on Great Jones street—though I'm not Great Jones himself—ha, ha! I'll explain this matter, then you can understand."

"Which I certainly cannot be expected to do if you don't explain it, Mr. Jones."

"Ah! that's so. There's business snap about you, young man. You'd make a good drummer, an excellent drummer, I should say. If you ever want a job in that line, come around and see me."

At that Happy Harry almost choked in his efforts to hold a burst of laughter that tried hard to get away from, and had to turn his face to the wall.

"Thank you, sir," responded Billy, smiling. "I'll remember your offer. But, now for your story."

"Yes, to be sure. You are business, from the ground up. Well, sir, my daughter has made the acquaintance of a man and engaged herself to marry him, and I'll be hanged if I know who or what he is. And, what's more, I can't seem to find out, in the usual ways."

"That's a little strange."

"A little strange! It's a good deal strange, young man! And that is just what I want you to do for me. I want you to take hold of the matter, sift it to the bottom, and give me the information I ought to have. My daughter is infatuated with the fellow, and is about to fling herself into his arms with both eyes shut, and her sixty thousand dollars with her."

"Ha! she has money, eh?"

"Yes; she has that sum in her own right, and as she is of age she can defy me if she wants to. She inherited the money from her mother, and has full control of it now."

"With money in the question, there may be a scheme at work, Mr. Jones. Let me hear more of the matter and it is possible the case will prove one that I may undertake. I draw the line tight at divorce business, refusing to do anything in that direction; this does not come under that head."

"Hardly, yet; though mercy only knows what it may come to if it isn't taken in time. But, what more can I tell you?"

"All you know about this chap who is about to carry off your daughter."

"Ha! yes, to be sure. Well, it is little enough I know about him, I assure you. His name, I believe, is Paul Vienett, and—"

"Christopher-Columbia-crowdin'-Chicago-with-crackers-an'-cheese!" exploded Happy Harry, before he could control the sudden impulse, but immediately he sought to cover his blunder.

Turning upon the inoffensive Seth, with fists clinched and eyes flashing, he added, fiercely:

"You stick a pin into me again, you ring-twisted chump of misery, you! and see if I don't clip you one that will tumble you clear over into the Fourth o' July! I'll make ye stare like a froze-up Feejee, dash on ye! I've a notion to hit ye once, anyhow!"

"Here! you boys! *hold your tongues!*" ordered Billy, sharply, with considerable of stress upon the last three words.

"I'll show him who he's stickin' pins into," growled Harry, as he subsided.

Mr. Jones of Great Jones street—"not Great Jones himself," had looked around at Harry's first word in exclamation, but now turned again to Billy, his eye completely shut by this little play on the part of the keen young detective apprentice who had thus so adroitly covered the blunder he had made.

Harry gave Seth a wink, Seth still sitting as stoical as ever.

"Where was I at?" asked Mr. Jones, wringing in an old "chestnut" which he thought a good deal of.

"You had just mentioned the man's name, sir," reminded Billy. "I think you called him Paul Vienett, if I understood you aright."

"Yes, that was it; that's his name. And that is all I know about him, too. I have hunted up one man by that name, but it is plain that he is not the person, and that's the mystery of it."

"You have found a Paul Vienett? It's an odd name, not by any means as common as John Smith."

"That's what I claim, too; but, this certainly is not the man I am after. I find this Vienett is a married man with a family."

"What is his address?"

"It was given—proof that this Vienett was the one who had been there in the office only so short a time before."

"Has your daughter seen this Vienett, sir?"

"Ha! why didn't I think of that? That would settle the question— But, of course this is not the same man."

"No, hardly to be supposed he is; but, that would prove it positively. There is no limit to rascality in this wise and wicked nineteenth century, Mr. Jones."

"That's so."

"But, mind you, I would not cast suspicion upon this man. I understand you have never seen this lover of your daughter's. How has he managed to keep out of your way, Mr. Jones? Have you tried to meet him?"

Jones was staring at the young detective in amazement. He could not get this through his head, at first.

"How the deuce do you know I have never

seen him?" he demanded. "I have not told you so."

"Had you seen him, you would have had proof at sight of Mr. Vienett the married, whether the two were one and the same man or not."

"Plague it, what a numskull I must be! No, I have never seen him, that's so, for he always came to the house when I have been away. He is a man of wealth and leisure, while I am a close business man, you see."

"That accounts for it. You must appoint an interview with him, Mr. Jones."

"I'm ahead of you there, sir; that's just what I have done, young man. Ha, ha, ha! Ahead of you there, sir."

Mr. Jones felt that his keenness was now established by proof.

"That is good," Billy approved. "When is this interview to take place? It will give me the opportunity for seeing the man, and I can then take up the trail and follow him."

"Just the thing, young man; just the thing, just the thing! He is coming to my house to meet me at two o'clock this afternoon. I'm going home from business now to spruce up and have it out with him. But, that don't say that I don't want a detective."

"I hardly see your need of one, on my word," Billy declared.

"Plague it, young man, haven't I made it plain to you yet? If I haven't it must be your fault."

Billy was willing to let Mr. Jones think so. It was plain that he had something more to disclose, whether important or not.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS HALCOMB'S STORY—SURPRISE.

"You see, it is just like this," Mr. Jones went on to explain, after some roundabout talk in getting down to it: "If I am able to get no more satisfaction out of him than I have out of my daughter, who has told me all she knows about him, then I shall know no more than I do now. Don't you see?"

"Still, *she* has faith in him, it seems."

"Blind faith, yes. He has fascinated her, I tell you. He has got her under a spell, as it were. I think he must be a sleek and sly devil."

"How long have you known of this engagement?"

"Only a little while. My daughter made it known to me, and the fellow is going to ask papa this afternoon—after it's all cut and dried. And, plague it! I am of the opinion papa will have something to say about it."

"If you find him all right, I suppose you will give consent?"

"Yes, I s'pose so."

"Then give consent, anyhow, and receive him on his word. Leave all the rest to me. If he is all right, I'll soon have the proof of it for you. If he is all wrong, you shall know that. There will be a little delay before the wedding, of course."

"Yes, of course, of course."

"Well, arrange it so."

"I press the button and you'll do the rest, eh? Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Jones laughed, having worked off another of his chestnuts in stock—what he considered a huge joke.

"Yes; and Jones pays the freight!" added Billy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Mr. Jones laughed, heartily. "That's good, young man, that's mighty good! Yes, Jones pays the freight! You are as bright as a dollar, you are, and if you ever want to go on the road for me, don't—"

"I'm going on the road for you now, sir," Billy reminded.

"And Jones pays the freight. Ha, ha, ha! Well, well, that came in pat, on my word. But, you say you will be around this

afternoon? You will want to come early, so as not to run up against His Lordship."

"On second thought," said Billy, "I cannot conveniently be there, as I have to attend an inquest this afternoon. I'll send one of my boys, which will answer the same purpose."

"Send a boy? One of these fellows?"

"Yes; these are my helpers. You may have heard of them."

"Certainly I have. Well, if you trust them I suppose I can, so, let one of them come. I'll put him where he can see the man and hear all that is said, and he can follow him when he goes away, if that is your plan."

"Yes, that is the plan. I'll send the silent one of the pair; you will know him at sight."

"Yes, yes. Well, all right, everything is understood."

Mr. Jones took leave, having mentioned the address of his residence.

No sooner had his footsteps sounded on the stairs without, than Happy Harry was standing on his head in the middle of the office floor, twirling his heels around in greatest glee.

"Couldn't help it, boss," he cried, leaping lightly from hands to feet the next moment.

"The surprise was so great that it popped out 'fore I knewed it was comin'; honor bright it did. But I hurried to switch it off so's he wouldn't tumble to the racket."

"And you did that well, too. But, now to business, for I must be off. Harry, you drop around to Vienett's, in disguise, as soon as you and Seth have had dinner; and Seth, you go around to Jones's, as planned. You understand the case—"

"No, chop me if I do," Harry disagreed.

"I mean, you know all the points as far as we have gone, and will know what to do as circumstances arise."

Details were quickly arranged as far as possible, and Billy took leave of the office and set out for the residence of the murdered man.

When he arrived there the door was opened to him by the housekeeper.

Billy was prepared to give her a thorough study in a glance, almost, and so he did.

He found her a mild-faced old lady, one in whom appeared no guile, and made up his mind at once, as Wedgley had done, that she was innocent of any share in the crime.

"I want to see the body, please," Billy said, simply.

"Who are you?" was asked.

"I'm from the police."

"Oh; all right."

She stepped back to allow him to enter, closing the door after he had done so.

"Now, come this way," she bade him.

Billy followed to a room in the rear of the parlor, where the body was lying on a table.

"All that is left of poor Mr. Hayzley," she said, sorrowfully, waving her hand toward the silent form on the board. "All that is left of the best friend I ever had, sir."

The keen young detective eyed the woman sharply again.

Why need she urge upon him immediately that the dead man had been her best friend?

"You had been with him a long time?" he inquired.

"Many years," she answered. "And to think that we should be torn thus rudely apart at last—"

A sob finished what she would have said, and tears fell from her eyes.

"You must have thought a great deal of him," Billy hinted.

"I loved him, sir. Ours was a love of the highest order. It was a love of the mind wholly, sir. We were engaged to be married when young, but—but—"

Billy waited for her to get control of her voice.

"I have not told this to the others," she said, presently. "It was not necessary, and

their faces did not win my confidence as yours has. We loved, and we decided to remain lovers for life, never marrying. And never were lives more happy than ours have been."

"A peculiar arrangement," Billy observed, quietly.

"Do not misunderstand our relations," the woman hastened to supplement. "But, I do not think you can. We loved as two brothers, or sisters, might love. Tell me, though, have the police made any headway in the terrible affair? Are they likely to find the wretch who killed Mr. Hayzley?"

"We have hardly begun, yet," Billy answered. "We hope, however, to get on track of the rascal before night."

He stepped to the table, and drawing the sheet from the dead face, looked at the features.

It was a mild and gentle face, and that the man had been noble-looking in life was plain enough.

On the neck was that terrible red mark where the garrote had done its deadly work, and in several places the skin had been cut through. It must have been applied with all the force a strong man could give it.

Satisfied, Billy replaced the sheet again, saying:

"Will you now take me to the room where the body was found, Miss—?"

"My name is Miss Halcomb, sir. Yes, come this way, please. I am anxious to do all I can to aid toward solving the mystery."

She led the way to the room in which the crime had been done, where the door showed evidence of having been forced—as it had been by Detective Wedgley and this woman.

That it had been locked within could not be questioned; Wedgley's report had been full and explicit regarding that. He had found the key in the lock on the inside, and a small bolt, too, had been forced at the same time. The windows had not been touched since the discovery.

These were fast enough, inside, and there was no explaining how the assassin had left the room.

Billy looked around with the closest scrutiny, but could find nothing to throw any light upon the matter.

It was as great a mystery, he believed, as he had ever tried to penetrate.

"Will you sit down, Miss Halcomb, and answer some questions?" he asked, taking a seat himself.

"I will do anything, sir," the resigned reply.

She took a chair opposite him, looking at him in a sad, despairing way.

"Tell me what has been asked you, by the officers, in brief, Billy first requested. "It will save my asking the same questions."

"Well, they wanted to know if Mr. Hayzley had an enemy; if there was any motive I could think of why any one should want to kill him; if he had said anything to me about being in danger; if he had any secret, so far as I knew, that might endanger his life."

"And what was your reply?"

"I had to say No to every question I have mentioned."

"Was that all they asked?"

"Oh, no; they asked me five hundred questions if they asked one, and some of the most trifling."

"But you could give them no satisfying reply to any?"

"I imagine not. But, no one could tell anything by the faces of such men. They were like faces of stone."

"What time did Mr. Hayzley come home last night?"

"He was not out last night. He came in late in the afternoon, took a little tea, and went at once to his room, saying he had

some important writing to do. He did not come out again alive, far as I know."

"Where is your room?"

"Over this one, sir."

"You heard no noise during the night?"

"Not a sound; and yet I am not a heavy sleeper, either."

"Well, here is a mystery, true enough. Miss Halcomb, what do you think about it?"

"I am incapable of thinking, almost, sir."

"Did the police mention the name Vienett to you?"

To Billy's surprise the woman partly sprung from her chair, her face paler than before, repeating the name as if gasping for breath.

CHAPTER V.

BILLY PROBES INTO THE PAST.

BROADWAY BILLY knew immediately he was on the point of making a discovery of some sort, perhaps a clew was about to fall into his hands.

He waited till the woman had settled down upon her chair again before he put another question.

"The name is not new to you, I see," he observed.

"N—no," the woman admitted.

"And the police had not mentioned it to you?"

"They had not, sir. I would like to ask how you came to know anything about a matter so far in the past."

"We detectives, madam, make it our business to find out things. To tell you just how we proceed in every case would be of little interest."

"Well, well," the woman said, resignedly, "it is a mystery to me, of course, and the name has not been in my mind before these many years. But, it can have nothing to do with the death of Mr. Hayzley, for Pietro Vienett has been dead a long time. I do not understand it."

"I thought his name was Paul," Billy ventured.

"No; Pietro. But, why did you ask if the police had mentioned his name to me?"

"Because there is some connection between that name and the death of Mr. Hayzley."

"I fail to comprehend how that can be. But, my great grief has almost bewildered my mind. Please explain it to me."

"Suppose you first tell me all you can about Pietro Vienett."

"Then you do not know the story?"

"No."

"Well, it is a simple matter after all, and so far in the past that it need be made no secret. Nor shall it be, nor should it be under any circumstances, if it can by any means aid in finding out the murderer of poor Charles."

Billy waited, without speaking.

"About the time when Charles and I first became acquainted," she went on, "I already had an acquaintanceship with this Pietro Vienett, and I have reason to believe that he loved me, though I did not love him. When I met Charles Hayzley my heart went out to him at once."

"You are a young man for a woman of my age to be talking to in this manner, but it is to the officer I speak, hoping to aid you in the task you have undertaken, if there be found any help for you in this matter. Well, as may be naturally supposed, Mr. Vienett became Mr. Hayzley's rival, though he was told at once, by me—that is, as soon as I had accepted Charles's attention, that his suit was hopeless."

"Seeing that I was determined, he gave way, but with threats such as people of the sunny climes are wont to make when crossed in love, for theirs is a fiery nature, you are aware. Mr. Vienett was an Italian, if I have not mentioned that fact already. He was wealthy, and polished in manners,

but there was something about him that I did not like from the first, and the longer I knew him the less I liked him. So, we parted anything but friends, and that was the last of it."

"Then he never sought to carry out the threats he had made?"

"No; or if he did, Charles never told me; and he died a few years later, anyhow, and so it ended—or so I thought."

"There was no mistake about his death, I suppose?"

"Oh, no. My brother, himself now dead, attended the funeral. No doubt about that."

"Did Mr. Hayzley appear relieved in mind when he knew he was dead?"

"No, sir; he expressed regret."

"Did this Italian marry after you rejected him?"

"He never married, sir, but died a single man."

"I can think of only one way of connecting him with Mr. Hayzley's death."

"And how is that?"

"That must have been a mistake about his dying. That he is still alive, and that at this late day he has taken his revenge."

"I tell you impossible. My brother and he were warm friends, and there can be no doubt about it. He died. It is folly for you to assume that he is living. I *know* he is dead."

"That settles the point, then. He is dead. Now, who is *Paul Vienett*?"

"I never heard of such a person."

"And yet such a person there is. He is an Italian by birth, about thirty-five years of age, at a guess, a man of means, and is married and has a family. He is evidently an honest and upright gentleman. He was brought to this country when very young, by an uncle."

"I never heard that *Pietro Vienett* had such a charge, sir, and he was very free in telling me a good deal about his family connections in Italy."

"Had you reason to doubt anything he told you?"

"Well, no; and yet he presented to my view a family without a blemish. Such families, I fancy, are scarce."

"Which looks suspicious, and the more so since this *Paul Vienett* has admitted that he believes his own father was not a person to be proud of in that close relationship."

"Then you have seen this *Paul Vienett*?"

"Certainly."

"What manner of man is he?"

"Tall, about the age I named, quite dark, closed-cropped black beard, and eyes piercing black."

"That is *Pietro Vienett*, as I knew him, for all the world!"

"Can it be that *Pietro* was the father of *Paul*, then? If so, he came to you with lies upon his tongue, there is no doubting that."

The woman was thoughtful.

"It is possible, in point of time," she answered. "But, it is hard to believe one apparently so frank could be such a deceiver."

"Yet, your womanly instinct put you on your guard against him, as you have admitted."

"Yes, yes, so it did."

"And you are willing to believe he may have lied to you."

"I cannot help thinking so, sir, after what you have presented to my mind."

"And, the fact that the description I have given of *Paul Vienett* pictures *Pietro* to you, seems to stand as proof. I must see *Paul* again and questioned him on this line. Now, do you think *Mr. Hayzley* kept any secrets from you?"

"We were ever confiding in each other. I do not think he kept anything important from me. We were as one person, in our minds and thoughts, our aims and our ambitions."

"Do you think he would have kept anything from you that would trouble your peace of mind if you knew it?"

"I can speak of that only by looking at myself and what I would have done. If I could have spared *Charles* any anxiety or trouble by withholding something from him, I would have kept it to myself."

"So you did, *Miss Halcomb*."

"How do you know?"

"Because he had a fear that his life was in danger."

"You amaze me, sir! He never let me have the slightest inkling of this. I now understand something that made me wonder at the time."

"What was that?"

"You see the small bolt there on the door?"

"Yes."

"He put that on not long ago, though he had been sleeping here for years with only the ordinary lock for his protection."

"What explanation did he make at the time he did it?"

"The key was missing from the lock for a day or two, and he said he did not think it prudent to sleep without some protection. I can now see a thoughtful trick in it all. He had taken the key out purposely to have the excuse for the bolt. The key was found soon after the bolt was put on."

"You are undoubtedly right," *Billy* agreed.

"But, how came you to know of this?" the woman inquired. "How did you know he had this dread?"

"He went to the police no later than yesterday, to ask protection; and at the same time making complaint against this *Paul Vienett*."

"Astonishing! I am amazed beyond expressing. And yet you say *Paul Vienett* is a gentleman above suspicion—you gave me that impression of him anyhow. How do you explain it, Mr.—"

"My name is *Weston*. I do not explain it, yet, madam. That is what I am seeking to do. If *Paul Vienett* is what he appears, then there must be two of that name in this city. I can see it in no other light. If this *Paul* is the guilty man, he is an actor *par excellence*."

"As was his father, if the suspicion you have raised be true—that *Pietro* was the rascal you have pictured, and was the father of this *Paul*. It almost turns my poor head, Mr. *Weston*."

"Well, I will trouble you with it no further, *Miss Halcomb*. It is now very near time for the inquest. There is one favor I would ask."

"What is that?"

"That you do not repeat this story to the other officers. You will be questioned regarding *Paul Vienett*; but you do not know the person, never saw him. If anything should happen to me—and you would hear of it, then you could tell the police all about it, as you have told me."

The woman agreed, and just there they were interrupted by a summons at the door below and their talk was brought to an abrupt ending.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TALL, DARK MAN.

BELIEVING that the details of the inquest would be of little interest, we pass it over briefly, except one feature.

It occupied about an hour and a half, and the verdict rendered was: That *Mr. Charles Hayzley* had come to his death at the hands of some person or persons to the jury unknown.

But, for the feature referred to.

The physician who had been called in to examine the body preparatory to giving expert testimony on the case had referred, incidentally, to the officer with whom he had talked while at his work.

The superintendent, the inspector, Detective *Wedgley* and others were present, and these looked at one another, questioningly.

"Was that you, *Wedgley*?" the superintendent asked.

"No, sir, it was not," the detective promptly answered.

"The remark made does not sound very professional," was the comment.

"No, the gentleman is not present," said the doctor, looking around.

"Here is something strange," spoke up the inspector. "What kind of looking man was he, doctor?"

"He was tall and dark, with keen black eyes and a black beard that was cut quite close all over, except the mustache, which was longer."

Broadway Billy, although not looking directly at *Miss Halcomb*, could see her start, and could feel her eyes upon him in a startled way. This was the description he had given her of *Paul Vienett*.

Billy let his gaze turn to the superintendent, and their eyes met.

The superintendent had a description of *Paul Vienett*, as *Billy* knew by the look he received as their eyes encountered.

"This man told you he was an officer?" inquired the coroner.

"Yes, sir."

"And you said he took some papers from the room?"

"He did."

"Claiming them by right of an officer?"

"Yes."

The superintendent rose, asking the privilege of putting a question or two—a request that was granted.

"Was this man in the room when you entered, doctor?" he asked.

"No; he came in while I was there."

"When did you first know of his presence?"

"Hearing a step behind me, I turned, and there he was."

"What did he first say to you?"

"Asked pardon for his intrusion, at the same time explaining that he was a police detective; said he had stepped in to examine the room more closely, and, if they could be found, to obtain some papers that were wanted."

"You took his word for that, of course."

"Certainly."

"What did he then?"

"Began looking around immediately, as a professional might, I imagine, and at length stepped to the table and opened a drawer, taking out some papers, and with them in his hand bowed his way out of the room."

When the coroner was done with the witness, the housekeeper was called, and as she had been greatly agitated from the beginning it was not observed that she was any more so.

"Do you know anything about this man mentioned by the doctor?" asked the coroner.

"I do not," the reply.

"Did you see him?"

"No, sir."

"Did you admit such a man into the house?"

"I did not, sir; had I done so, I would have seen him certainly."

A few more questions, of no more importance, and the coroner closed and the inquest ended with the result shown.

As soon as it was over the superintendent left the room, motioning the inspector and *Broadway Billy* to follow him, and led the way up to the room where the dark deed had been done.

The inspector in turn had beckoned Detective *Wedgley* to follow, and when the four entered the room the door was closed.

"What think you?" asked the superintendent.

"It is a great mystery, sir," answered the

detective. "I hardly know which way to turn."

"You mean about the tall, dark man," the inspector caught on quickly. "That description fits Paul Vienett about as closely as it can."

"Yes, that is it. But, it seems he was not the man. What do you think of it, Billy?"

"I am inclined to the belief that there are two Paul Vienetts in the case."

"So think I. And, more, I think I understand, now, how it was the room was discovered locked on the inside."

"You think the murderer was in the room all the time?" suggested Billy.

"I do."

"What, even when I broke in the door?" cried Wedgley.

"Yes."

"Impossible!"

"Ah, why impossible?"

"Where could he be in hiding?"

"I have come up for the purpose of finding out that very thing. Let us look the room over well with that idea in view."

"But the doctor said he came in while he was here, did he not?" reminded Wedgley.

"He thought he did. The first he saw of him was when the man was standing behind him. The man himself stated that he had just entered."

"That's so."

"Well, where was he hid?"

They looked, and looked well, but it did not appear that there was any place where so tall a man could possibly have been in hiding.

"That theory begins to fade," the superintendent admitted. "There does not seem to be a place here where he could have concealed himself and escaped observation when the door was forced."

"Oh, he was not here; that is out of the question," assured Wedgley.

"Still, how did he get out of the room and leave it locked as it was found? Can you explain that part of the puzzle? If you can you will take a long step toward the solving of the riddle."

"I give it up."

"Not to be thought of, sir," the superintendent rebuked. "I expect you to get at the bottom of this thing."

"What are you going to do about Paul Vienett?" asked Billy.

"Leave him to you detectives."

"Just what I was going to request you to do, sir. I want to handle him a little in my own way."

"Do what you please with him. I do not see that we could gain anything by arresting him on suspicion now. It is plain that he was at home last night—or so he is able to prove, at any rate."

They spent some time in the room, and when they went down the coroner and his jury had gone, together with the reporters who had been present, and the old housekeeper was alone with a few friends who had dropped in to keep her company.

"My good woman, what will you do now?" asked the superintendent, kindly.

"I shall remain here, I suppose, sir," was the reply.

"By what right will you continue to make it your home?"

"I think it will be found that Mr. Hayzley has provided for me in his will, sir, when the will is read."

"Ah! that is enough, then. But, by the way, who was your dead master's lawyer?"

The woman mentioned his name, and the four left the house together.

Only a few steps had they gone, when a voice was heard calling, and looking back they saw the housekeeper at the door.

"Will you, young man, please come back here?" she requested, indicating Billy.

Billy excused himself, and turned back.

He entered the house, and when the door

had been closed the woman led him into the parlor.

"I could not let you go without asking what you think about that man whom the doctor spoke about," she said. "Who can it have been?"

"The murderer, I think," Billy answered. "And the papers he took, what were they, that he should have interest in them? Besides, there is no drawer in that table!"

"No drawer in the table? There certainly must be, or the doctor would not have said he saw the papers taken from such a place. Let us go up there at once and see."

That they did, and to the surprise of Miss Halcomb a drawer was found, now a little way open, where she had never had a suspicion, before, that a drawer existed, or could exist.

It was plain that Charles Hayzley had not trusted her with everything.

CHAPTER VII.

TALKING BUSINESS.

"This thing grows the more mysterious, the further we get into it," the keen young detective remarked.

"I cannot understand anything about it," the woman admitted, in a puzzled manner.

"Have you any idea of the nature of the papers that Mr. Hayzley had in this secret drawer, madam?"

"Not the slightest, sir."

"Maybe his will?"

"No; his lawyer has that. He told me all about his will, long ago, and where it would be found if anything happened to him."

"And he left everything to you?"

"Nearly so, I believe."

"Was he a very wealthy man?"

"Oh, no, not as wealth counts in these days; he own this house, and had some thousands, otherwise invested."

"But, you had always thought that he trusted you fully with everything; can you say how it was that he had never let you know about this secret drawer?"

"I cannot, sir; but, I am willing to believe that it did not concern my happiness in any way or he would have told me about it. Maybe it was something I had no need to know."

Billy examined the drawer.

It was opened by means of a simple spring underneath, but one not likely to be discovered by accident.

In the drawer were some Italian text books, with a small Italian-English lexicon, together with some other trifles of no importance.

"Did Mr. Hayzley understand Italian?" Billy asked.

"Not that I know of, sir."

"This looks as though he had at least studied it a little, anyhow. You had no knowledge that he was interested in it?"

"Not the slightest."

"Well, he certainly did not take you into his confidence in everything, Miss Halcomb. If he had done so, the solving of this mystery might now be an easier matter than it is likely to prove."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. This drawer held the secret on account of which the terrible crime was done."

"Can it be possible!" in amazement.

"I feel certain of it. And, I think I have proof that Paul Vienett is, after all, innocent of the deed, as he declares."

"Oh, it is no use my trying to think it out, sir; my poor head is not equal to it. Tell me, won't you, what it is you see in all this? Do you see a hope of finding out the murderer?"

"That is what I am working for, madam. I have told you Charles Hayzley went to the police yesterday, asking their protection, at the same time making an informal charge against one Paul Vienett. He said he held

a secret that endangered his life. That secret was in this drawer."

"But, you think Paul Vienett innocent, you say?"

"The Paul Vienett I have seen—yes. I inferred from the talk I had with him that he is not acquainted with the Italian language, and papers in Italian could be of little use to him. But, madam, it is useless for me to be giving you these mere speculations. If what I suspect proves true, I will tell you all about it after the case has been worked out."

"Yes, yes, it is useless, for I fail to understand you. I hardly know what you have said, for my head is so confused. My grief is all I am capable of thinking about."

So, Billy said a few comforting words and left her.

There was no doubt in his mind about her entire innocence in the terrible affair.

He agreed with Detective Wedgley that she was open and frank in everything, and he had been able to judge even better than the other, having had further insight into her life and character.

It was late in the day, by this time, and he bent his steps toward his office, hoping there to meet Harry or Seth, or both.

In the mean time the two detective apprentices, so to call them, had not been idle by any means, but had been doing their best upon the duties their chief had given them to perform.

Happy Harry, it will be remembered, had been detailed to shadow the Vienett house, in disguise, with orders to follow Vienett if he went out anywhere, learning all he could about the man.

Silent Seth's part had been to go to the residence of Henry Jones, there to see the Paul Vienett who was to call there, and to shadow him when he departed.

Let us follow Happy Harry.

In a clever disguise he made his way in the direction of the home of Paul Vienett, after he and Seth had dined.

He was making no haste, neither was he loitering, and he had almost reached his destination when he came suddenly face to face with Paul Vienett himself.

There was no mistaking the man he had so recently seen at the office; so, when he had passed, Harry allowed him to gain a little start and then set forward upon his track to shadow him.

The man had not looked at Harry, proof that the young detective was in a perfect disguise.

"Got onto his parade sooner than I expected," Harry said to himself. "If I had been a little later I wouldn't; though, and that's the fact. Might have had a long watch for nothing. Seems to me I have tumbled into luck right at the beginning. No mistaking that man. I'd know him anywhere."

The man walked at a leisurely pace, once consulting his watch as if time had something to do with his errand, wherever he was going, and his manner went to indicate that he had plenty of it at his command.

It was no trouble for Harry to follow his suspect, for the man did not once look around, evidently having no suspicion that he was being watched. And, had he done so, he would not have known who Harry was; or so, at any rate, Harry had good reason to believe.

"Christopher Columbus!" Harry finally exclaimed in thought. "He's bearing in the direction of the home of Jonesey, hang me if he ain't! I'll bet a red herring to a pickled onion that this same Paul Vienett is the man who is after Jonesey's girl! He's a deep one, he is, if this is so, and ten to one he is the man who killed Hayzley!"

Harry felt the fever rising rapidly, now, and he was flushed with keenest detective interest in the case.

The man kept on, drawing near to the

address Jones had given, and at last, to Harry's almost breathless delight, stopped at that very house and rung the bell.

The door opened, and he was admitted.

"Crackers an' cheese!" Harry cried, twirling around on one heel to the astonishment of the passers-by; his exclamation, however, not loud enough to be understood. "Now Silent Seth has got him, and if he don't run him through a wringer we'll both do it when he comes out. The jeebeeb is going to do some jeebing now, sure. There's fun ahead, I'm betting."

There was nothing further for Harry to do but to wait.

In the mean time Silent Seth had come to the house, and had been admitted into the presence of Mr. Jones.

"Ha! here you are, hey, my boy?" the brisk and businessy merchant had greeted him. "Well, I'll take care of you. Nobody is to mention that you are here. You just step in here."

He opened the doors of a huge wardrobe that stood in the room, and Seth was immediately in hiding.

In due time came Mr. Paul Vientett.

Jones had given orders that he should be shown into this rear room at once upon his arrival.

Miss Jones, hearing of this, had complained that it was hardly the proper thing to do, but Jones *pere* decided promptly that it was his house yet, he guessed!

Enough has been let drop to establish the inference that the Joneses were of the moneyed aristocracy, and held their hold upon the social world by force of the strength of a chain of "\$" links.

"Have I at last the pleasure?" Mr. Vientett cried, on being announced at the door, not noticing anything of the lack of honor to himself such as Miss Jones had feared. "Have I at last the honor to meet Mr. Jones? That I have not had the pleasure before has not been wholly my fault, if you can pardon me for saying so."

Silent Seth could see as well as hear, from his hiding-place, and he saw the tall dark man advance and offer his hand as he spoke.

He, like Harry, recognized him as the Paul Vientett who had been at the office that morning!

"Glad you find it such pleasure, sir," greeted Jones, giving his hand in a business-like way. "Hope I find you enjoying good health, Mr. Vientett. My daughter has spoken to me about you, and I take it this is a business matter we are to talk about, ain't it?"

"Well, this is rather abrupt; but, yes, it has the *nature* of business, I must confess. The fact is, sir—"

"But, don't let's go ahead too fast," Jones interrupted. "Sit down, now, and we'll get at it right. I don't like to make deals in haste myself, and don't want to be a party to hasty deals."

Mr. Vientett took a seat, and Mr. Jones said next:

"Now, sir, how are you fixed?"

"How?" evidently not knowing what the man of plain business ways and terms was getting at.

"Yes, sir, *now*, how are you fixed?—that is, how much are you worth?"

"Oh! Why, I am worth about fifty thousand dollars, here, to say nothing of the estates coming to me in time in Italy."

"I suppose you are a single man?—that there is nothing—"

"Sir!"

The dark man grew darker still, partly rising out of his chair, his keen eyes flashing ominously.

"That's what I mean, sir," Mr. Jones went on serenely. "I don't know you, and mean to ask you just such questions as that. Are you *free* to marry honorably or not?"

"Sir! you insult me!" the lover cried. "I am a Vientett—which ought to be suffi-

cient for you. Free to marry? Of course I am free to marry, sir! But, sir, I do not bestow my honored name without proper dower. How much does your fair daughter possess?—since you are so *very* business-like."

CHAPTER VIII.

WONDER OF WONDERS!

SILENT SETH, in his place of concealment, allowed his face to relax into a smile.

He knew that Jones had brought forward his blunt question in the manner he had for his benefit, so that he could note its effect upon the dark man.

But, now the seeking lover had paid back the favor of bluntness, giving Mr. Jones to understand that if he married his daughter it would be a matter of condescension on his part.

More than that, there must be a bag of gold thrown into the balance.

Mr. Jones having shown the detective's apprentice what the man would say to the hint of his being already married, so the youth could report to his chief, now became more placable in tone, conforming to Broadway Billy's direction as to how he should handle the matter.

"Well, don't get riled, Mr. Vientett," he said. "As the father of my child, it was a question I had a right to ask. Anyhow, I assumed that right. Now, as to the matter of dower, as you call it—"

"Something to which you Americans are hardly accustomed, I know," the applicant interrupted.

"When we want titles we have to come down to get them," Jones rejoined, in his purely business way of expressing what he meant. "In the way of dower, then, my daughter has about a cool fifty in her own right."

"Fifty—what, sir?"

"Thousand, of course."

"Dollars?"

"Why, to be sure; do you think we talk about anything else here, when we talk business?"

"That will be satisfactory to me. The great question, then—may I have your daughter to be my wife, Mr. Jones? With love and money on both sides, what better can you desire for her?"

"The *great* question seems to come in as an after consideration, with you, Mr. Vientett. But, that's business, so I suppose I should not find fault on that account. Yes, you can have her; but, there must be a condition named in the contract."

"What is that, sir?"

"That this thing is not to come to a head till three months from date."

"And do you insist upon that?"

"I do."

"Suppose your daughter thinks otherwise?"

"Well, in that case, she will do as she pleases in spite of you and me together. But, she will probably obey her dad in the matter."

The two men became affable and agreeable, Mr. Vientett told about himself to a considerable extent, and after awhile they repaired to the parlor where Jones turned him over to his daughter.

Jones returned to the room where the interview had taken place.

Silent Seth was out of the closet.

"Well, what do you think, boy?" he asked. "I suppose I can talk to you as to your master."

"If you want to, certainly," Seth was willing. "I think this man is the one who was at the office this morning, and that he is a rascal who is playing a deep game all around."

"You do?"

"I do."

"That's queer; I had made up my mind the fellow told me the truth, and that there *must* be two of them."

"Could two men look so very much alike, do you think?"

"Well, there you have me."

"I'll report to my chief, sir, what I have seen and heard," Seth promised. "And now I'll leave the house, to be ready to follow him when he comes out. I will in that way get the proof, you know."

"That's so. Out with you, while he is talking with my daughter, and you'll see him when he leaves."

And so he dismissed Seth from the house. And, when he had closed the door after him, stepped into the parlor to excuse himself, saying he would return to business for the rest of the day.

He was excused, and retired from the scene.

His business there was done, evidently, and neither daughter nor lover had any further use for him.

Miss Jones merely figures in our romance, and is hardly worth the introducing, further than to say that she was one of those silly girls of the silly sort who are on the lookout for a foreign alliance.

She was in a fair way toward making one—to her sorrow!

But, to follow Seth.

When he stepped out of doors he looked around to take in the lay of the land, so to say, to decide upon a place where he could best await the appearance of the man he was shadowing.

What was his amazement, as he looked, to behold a tall, dark man, walking down the street, with Happy Harry on the other side keeping him under surveillance.

He could but stare in amazement undisguised.

"Well, here's the proof," he told himself, promptly. "I know my man is in this house, and there is Harry looking after him, double. That must be the *true* Paul Vientett, for Harry was set to watch his house."

He left the stoop and sauntered down the street a little way, where he took up a position to await the appearing of his man.

Harry and his suspect passed on and out of sight.

Seth waited patiently for the appearance of the Paul Vientett in whom he was interested, and at last he came out of the house.

He walked away up the street at a brisk pace, and Seth, taking up the trail, was after him like the alert and silent shadower that he was. The man who could elude him would have to be keen indeed.

At a corner the man took a car, and Seth being close, managed to get aboard the same plebeian chariot with him.

The man gave no attention to Seth, not suspecting that he was shadowed, and Seth certainly was not to be caught paying attention to him.

But he did, all the same, and close attention, too.

Finally he saw the man take a new hold upon the light cane he carried, and look out the window, and the boy knew he was about to alight.

Seth rose from his seat and went out to the platform, and when he saw his suspect rise, though not looking at him direct but seeming to be watching the street, he prepared to alight.

The man went out the front door, at the same time that Seth dropped off the rear of the car, and if the man looked he saw Seth step lively and disappear around the corner.

There, though, the Silent Shadower stopped, and for a moment waited.

When he came out into sight on the avenue, the tall, dark man was going from him.

Seth followed, as before, but now the trail was nearing its ending, and in a little distance further another tall, dark man was seen approaching, and Seth, looking further, saw Happy Harry!

The two men met before the entrance to a popular "garden," and together entered.

Seth and Harry were at an adjoining entrance promptly, and as they looked within an astonishing thing happened.

At first they saw the two men, but as they looked the two men seemed to merge into one, and still further, as they stared, that one disappeared from sight under their very eyes!

Harry looked at Seth, and Seth looked at Harry.

"Christopher Columbia!" Harry exclaimed in whisper. "What do ye make of it, anyhow, Stoick?"

"You could knock me over with a feather," Silent Seth admitted. "This is something that beats my time. I give it up."

"Come on in, anyhow," urged Harry. "We'll see what comes of it, if anything at all is to come of it, which I don't know. I don't know anything. My head is all mush and milk."

The avenue was lively, at that hour, and the place was well thronged with patrons.

It was one of those gilt and glass palaces where music and beer are liberally dispensed, and was unusually rich with massive mirrors.

These mirrors were so arranged, or some of them, as partly to shut out from view from the doors what was going on back in the garden, although the passer-by was deceived into believing, at a glance, that he saw it all.

Harry and Seth went through the place, loiteringly, but not a sign further was to be seen of either of the two tall, dark men.

"Well, I give it up," Harry finally declared.

"Same here," echoed Seth. "I hate to, but we are dumped."

"And we may as well be going. Suppose we'll get the bounce."

"We couldn't help it."

"But, Broadway Billy won't want two such gillies on his staff, you can bet. I see him blushin' for us already."

"Well, come on, for we have no further business here. We have run up against something we can't explain, and have lost our game. No use monkeying here any longer."

So, they left the place and set out for the office.

They were talking over the matter as they went along, when suddenly Harry let out one of his pet exclamations, stopping short.

"What is it?" asked Seth.

"Paul Vienett, the sure-enough!"

"What about him?"

"We'll go and see if he's home or not."

"He can't be, unless he has gone there in the spirit, that's sure."

"I'm willing to believe anything, Seth. That man is in cahoots with the Old Boy, I think."

Having decided, they made haste to get to their destination as quickly as possible, and arriving there, asked for Mr. Vienett.

They found him at home. He had just come in, was said. And having to offer some excuse for their presence (they were without disguise, now), they said perhaps their chief would call on him that evening, if he would be at home.

CHAPTER IX.

MORE MYSTERY STILL.

THESE events had occupied nearly all the afternoon, and when the two boys reached the office they found Broadway Billy on hand awaiting them.

Happy Harry dropped upon a chair immediately in a wilted way, hanging his arms and drooping his head.

"Boss, have you got a toothpick?" he asked.

"I'll fan you with a club instead, if you don't brace up and have a little more style about you," threatened Billy, who guessed the request Harry would have made.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Just discharge me and let me go!" Harry rejoined. "You don't want such a limber-brained gillie any longer. I'll go sneak off into a quiet corner and die. I'm of no use to you. I've got a chronic weakness of the brain that is beyond all remedy, and the sooner—"

"Seth, what's up?" Billy interrupted, turning to the Silent Shadower, seeing by the face of both boys that something had gone amiss with them.

"Nothing is up, sir; everything is down," Seth made reply. "We have been dumped in the neatest way you ever heard of, and in a way we can't understand. I feel almost like Harry."

"Christopher Columbia—"

"Tell me about it, without waste of words," Billy ordered.

So, Seth told the story as briefly as possible, Billy giving attention to the end without interruption.

"Will the bottom of this mystery ever be reached?" the young prince of metropolitan detectives mused, when Seth had concluded. "It seems to be growing deeper and deeper at every step."

"Yes, and we're in it over our heads, too," chimed in Harry. "Anyhow I am. Seems to me the woods must be full of Paul Vietnets. But, there is one thing we have got onto, anyhow."

"What is that?" asked Billy.

"Why, that this Paul the Good is fist-in-pocket with Paul the Bad. We have seen 'em both together!"

"That is a puzzling point. I don't think we ever had a case showing so many complications all at one time, did we? I'm puzzled as badly as I used to be sometimes when a kid."

"They are too much for us, that's what's the matter," declared Harry. "We stand no show at all against 'em, for they must know every move we make. It wouldn't surprise me if we got into a consarned difficulty before we know it. Paul the Good is onto us, heavy."

"You haven't told me your side of the affair yet, Harry," Billy reminded. "I want to hear from you, too."

"Well, it's short and sweet, boss. I set out to go to Vienett's house to shadow it, as you said, and as I came near I met him coming away and fell in behind and followed him."

"And he went straight to Jones's?"

"Straight as a stick."

"Then both the original and the shadow were in the house at the same time, it appears."

"That's where I'm all at sea," Harry had to own. "I don't think it's likely they were, boss."

"Well, it does not look reasonable, but didn't I understand you to say the man came out of the house while you watched?"

"Don't think ye did, boss. That was what I thought, till I fell in with Seth and his man, when I was all turned inside-out in my ideas. I'm inside-out yet, fer that matter."

"Explain."

"Well, while I watched the house I didn't keep my eyes glued on the door every second in every minute, but kept close enough watch so that the man couldn't escape me, you bet. I noted every person who passed along, too. And, the first I knew there was my man."

"And you thought he had come out of the house."

"Of course. I heard a door shut, which made me look up quick, and there was my man just moving away from the steps. But, now I reckon he must have been com-

ing up the street and the door had nothing to do with him. I hadn't the slightest doubt but it was my man."

"Then they look so very much alike?"

"Two pins couldn't be more alike, boss."

In that Seth agreed, too.

"It is a riddle, sure enough. But, the fact of their melting together, as you called it, and then vanishing in the air—that is all idle nonsense. You must have had a fit about that time and imagined it."

This in a slightly-bantering manner.

"No fit about it!" asserted Harry, quickly. "Guess I know what I see, boss, and Seth says the same thing, too. Didn't we see it jest that way, Seth? 'Course we did! I tell ye we have got ter roll up our sleeves and git right down to it, if we want to do anything for our country this time."

Broadway Billy paced the floor in thought for some time.

What to make of it all he did not know. He could not understand the game the two men were trying to play.

Here had been one of them to his office that day, placing a case in his hand in which the other was to be hunted out and brought to account for using his name and passing in his identity.

Right on top of that was proof that these men were working together with some object in view, and the one, having put the detective on the track of the other, was taking no precaution not to be brought into the suspicion himself. What did it mean, anyhow?

Had the crime been a trifling matter, it would not have seemed so strange; but it was a capital offense, for which both might have to suffer the death penalty, and that they should run such risks was amazing.

Little wonder the keen young detective was puzzled; it would have baffled an older head.

And then their disappearance as reported by the boys—

"I simply give it up, till I can get a cinch on it," Billy brought his musings to a close with a snap. "We have got to be up and doing, boys; this will bring us nothing. But, we have not lost anything by talking the matter over and taking our bearings before setting out anew. Now, I'm going to drop around and see Jones, then to supper, and then go and see Vienett, as you have planned for me. After that I'll drop around to the Golden Garden in disguise."

"And what about us?" asked Harry. "Shall we go home and tell mom to put us to bed?"

Billy laughed at his sober-earnest answer.

"Not by any means," he answered.

"You get a little rest and your supper, and then one of you drop around to Vienett's while the other gives attention to the Golden Garden. In disguise, of course. And, if you get a sight of either of these men, stick to him like grim death."

"Till he goes up in smoke," added Harry.

"No smoke about it," supplemented Seth.

"Simply goes off in the air. Now you see him and now you don't!"

Billy left the office and went around to Headquarters.

The inspector was there, and at sight of Billy he desired to know what progress had been made.

Billy sat down and related such particulars as he wanted to let out at that time, and the inspector listened with keenest attention.

"I don't know what to make of it, Billy," he had to admit. "And now here is something further for you to puzzle your young brain with—I say young, but I guess it is mature enough."

"I feel about ten years old, on this case, so far," Billy admitted. "But, what is it now?"

"We have another case in which this same Paul Vienett figures."

"I shall not be surprised at anything I

hear respecting that man—or these men, for there are two of them."

"Yes, two of them, and both rascals, as it now appears. The home life of the goody-goody one is only a blind to his true character, it seems. I'll be glad to see him downed."

"And I'll bring him down, if I don't miss my guess. But, the new case, let me have it."

"A robbery has been reported, and there is a clue leading straight to one Paul Vienett as the guilty man."

"Have you arrested him?"

"No; and silence has been enjoined respecting the matter. As murder is greater than robbery, we want to get him on the murder case first, and the superintendent and I have decided to leave him to you and Wedgley till you have had time to work up that case."

"Then the robbery will not get into the papers?"

"Not likely that it will. The case is this: A tall, dark man entered the office of Banker Brothers, brokers, this afternoon, and coolly took up a bundle of bills and went out in haste, locking the door after him, and before the lone clerk was able to get out to give the alarm he was out of sight."

"Cool business."

"I should say so. The clerk says he mistook him for one of the partners, as he came in, and did not pay much attention to him, as the man came right into the inclosed part of the office and stepped to the safe. The younger Banker is tall and dark, and so the clerk is to be partly excused for the mistake he made. As he was going out, however, the clerk looked again, and then saw his mistake and shouted for the fellow to stop. It was then too late, and the man made his escape as I said."

"But, the clue he left, which you spoke about."

"Oh, yes. Well, when the clerk shouted at him the fellow made more haste, and dropped something from a pocket which fell on the floor inside the door. When the clerk picked it up it proved to be a card bearing the name and address of Paul Vienett, the address the same as that of the Paul Vienett we are interested in already. Then, the fact that he was a tall, dark man, brings the matter right home to him, you see."

"Or to his double."

"Yes, one or the other. But, that seems to make little difference, since, as it appears, they are both in the same boat."

"They appear to be, but I cannot understand the audacity the fellow had in coming and engaging me to hunt down his double. Can you? It was the most foolish act he could have done, if he is the rascal he appears to be. It is the very foolishness of it all that baffles me."

In which the experienced inspector agreed.

CHAPTER X.

PAUL VIENETT'S PROMISE.

FROM there Billy went straight to the business place of Henry Jones, the man of business.

He found him in, and Jones was delighted to see him.

"Plague it! but I'm glad you have dropped around," he cried. "Sit down and let's talk business."

Billy sat, and Mr. Jones squared around, facing him as though the young detective were a country merchant about to lay in a stock of goods in his line.

"Well, did your lad report what he had heard and seen?"

"Yes, he told me all about it. But, you did not tell him whether you recognized this Vienett as the one whose address we have. How about that point? That is what I am after."

"Same man, sir, same man," Mr. Jones declared, emphatically.

"Proof again how much the two resemble each other. It was *not* the same man, Mr. Jones."

"Then it was his ghost, and a pretty solid ghost at that."

"It was his double, the fellow who has been making use of his name. If the same Vienett, then he is a fool, that's all."

"Explain."

"Well, you had seen Vienett the married, and if he sought your daughter, in order to get her money—let me put it—do you suppose he would let you see him again before he had accomplished his purpose?"

"That's so, that's so! Hadn't thought it out that far. But, I played into his hands, same as you told me to do, and I guess I closed his eye for him pretty tight shut."

"I don't know whether you did or not—hang it! I don't know anything, Mr. Jones."

"Why, what's the matter, young man?"

"Hardly know that, either; but, I'll drop in again and see you, and maybe next time we meet I'll be able to tell you something."

"Plague it! young man, you have got me all in a stew, now, to know what you are hintin' at. Stop and tell me before you go. Jones pays the freight, you know. Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy delayed long enough to give the merchant a few facts and suspicions, which went to prove that the two Vienetts were friends rather than enemies; and that done, he took his leave and gave his attention to seeking some supper, for he was as hungry as a bear.

That done, he set forth afresh, his objective point being the Vienett residence.

"Ask Mr. Vienett if he can see Mr. Weston," he told the girl who answered his ring.

"He has given directions to have you shown right into the parlor, sir," was the prompt response. "Please step in, sir."

Billy entered the parlor, and in a few moments Mr. Vienett came in, as cool and easy in manner as possible to imagine. He certainly did not look the rascal he evidently was.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Weston," he greeted. "I infer that you have made a discovery. Your boys were here this afternoon, and said you might drop in on me this evening, and I guessed at once that you had learned something."

The man's manner was the same as it had been at the office that morning. He was apparently frank and open in all he said.

Billy was nonplused.

"I have made the discovery that you have got ahead of me in the work," he remarked, in a quiet way, with impressive earnestness.

"Got ahead of you—I?"

"Yes."

"Why, how—in what way? I fail to understand you, utterly."

"You got ahead of me in finding your double. What have you been able to ascertain regarding him?"

The man stared at Billy in completest amazement.

If it was acting, then he was the king of actors, as Billy mentally told himself.

"Why, sir, you are greatly misinformed," he cried. "I have not seen the person at all. I know no more about him than I did this morning."

"You were out this afternoon."

"That is true."

"May I ask where you went?"

"I walked over to Denning's to do an errand for my wife, at the same time to stretch my legs."

"And from there you went to the Golden Garden."

"I know of no such place, sir."

"But, you were followed. You were seen to meet your double, who looks just like you."

"It is not so, sir!" in great earnest. "It

is not so! I went simply and only to Denning's, and came from there home, by a little different course. But, who has been following me?"

"I had a detective shadowing your double, and as he had seen you he knew you when you met your double and together you entered the Golden Garden."

"You insist that I am lying to you, Mr. Weston?"

"No; I am only repeating the information that was brought to me, that is all, sir."

"Well, you have been wrongly informed. I can say no more than that, for I cannot prove anything. There must be *two* men who look like me."

Billy smiled.

"That is out of reason, sir," he declared. "We occasionally find two persons who look very nearly alike, but three—never; or, at any rate I never heard of it."

"Nor I; but it must be so in this instance, if your detective has given you truthful information, for I swear to you, sir, that neither of the men he saw was I. I hope you will take my oath for it, since you would not take my word."

"I had not refused to take your word, sir. Don't forget that I am working in your interest on this case."

"I hoped you were, at any rate. What has been learned about the murder mystery?"

"Nothing further, sir."

"Where is this Golden Garden you mentioned?"

Billy informed him.

"A kind of place I never go into," Mr. Vienett declared. "You have been misinformed, so far as the truth of my identity is concerned."

"Taking your word for it, Mr. Vienett, how can I account for what my man saw?" Billy asked.

"There must be a mistake, somehow, somewhere."

"Impossible, for there were two, and they both tell the same story."

Mr. Vienett pulled at his mustache savagely, while his face grew darker than it was naturally.

"Is this your card, sir?" Billy asked.

He held out to him the card that had been found at the office where the robbery had been done, which he had brought from the inspector's office.

Mr. Vienett took it and a single glance was enough.

"It is," he answered.

"You admit it, I see. Can you prove that it is yours?"

"I think I can, sir. Here is my case; compare it with those you find within, Mr. Weston."

Billy opened the case and took out a card. It was exactly like the other.

"The proof seems to be all that is required," he said. "Now, Mr. Vienett, I will tell you where this was found."

"I am eager to have you do so."

"This afternoon a robbery was done. The banking office of Banker Brothers was entered, boldly, and the thief carried off a large sum of money from the open safe. In leaving the office in haste he dropped this card."

"Is it possible?"

"It is true. And, he was described as a tall, dark man—in short, his description fits you exactly. So, you see, here is more mystery."

"The work of that rascal again!" the man cried. "Can you not find and arrest him, Mr. Weston? Get hold of him, and then maybe this mystery can be cleared up. I am doubly in danger, now."

"Suppose I were to think you guilty, what explanation could I give for your actions all around? You have admitted that this is card is yours, and have given proof of it. What am I to think?"

"I would like to know just what you do think."

"Well, I think you innocent, Mr. Vienett, though it is in the face of the greatest amount of evidence the other way. I have evidence enough against you to arrest you now, did I desire to do that."

"Why do you not do it?"

"I want to see how willing you are to prove your innocence."

"Ha! this opens a new view. Only tell me what I must do to prove it to the satisfaction of your mind, and see how gladly I'll do it."

"I take you at your word. I want you to go to the Golden Garden."

"I'll do it. What am I to do there?"

"Simply go in, sit down, and await developments. If your double enters and speaks to you, engage him in talk. I will be on hand to hear what passes, and then I will shadow him."

"It shall be done. At what hour do you want me there?"

"Say at nine."

"No need to say another word. I'll be on hand, though I will no doubt act awkward, having never visited such a place."

"Do you mean to tell me that, as a young man, you never visited such resorts, although brought up right here in Gotham under the shadow of the elephant?"

"That I do tell you, sir."

"Then you are goody-goody indeed, as I have heard you called. But, the more honor to you for it, sir. I am sorry that I am under the necessity of asking you to break your record."

"I am willing to risk breaking my neck, almost, to have this harrowing mystery cleared up."

"Very well; be there at nine, and I will appear in a disguise, making myself known to you at the proper time, if at all. I want to see you and your double together."

"And you may see me take him by the throat and demand a full explanation—"

"No, no; leave all that to me, Mr. Vienett."

CHAPTER XI.

VICTIMS OF THE VIENETTS.

HAPPY HARRY was one of the team set to watch the Vienett residence, and he was at his post when Broadway Billy took leave from the house.

A sly signal was passed, telling Harry the man was at home, and the young aspirant to detective honors began watching as though looking for a mouse instead of a man.

Broadway Billy went off, and hurried to his office to assume a disguise.

Silent Seth had been appointed for duty at the Golden Garden, and took up his station there about the time Harry reached the place assigned to him.

It looked as though something would be brought to light now, if ever.

A little while after Broadway Billy had gone from the house, Happy Harry saw his man come forth.

He came out from the lower part of the house—that is, from the basement, as though he had set forth immediately after leaving the dinner table.

If so, he had dined late, but no doubt the visit Billy had made would account for that.

Harry followed as closely as he thought prudent, but the trail was an easy one and one not likely to give him trouble.

Nor did it, and in due time the man reached the Golden Garden.

He entered, and as he did so Harry saw him greet another man, one who was his very counterpart in all respects.

The two turned and walked away toward the rear of the garden, when of a sudden, as before, Harry saw the two merge into one, as it looked, and in the next moment the one was gone!

Both were gone, more properly, for all trace of both was lost.

"Christopher-Columbia-crawlin'-to-Chicago-in-a-crate-o'-crackers!" Happy Harry voiced, almost as one word, though in low tone.

This was something that puzzled him, and he could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes.

"Well," he muttered, "there's one sure thing about it, and that is, that we have got the dead-wood on Paul Vienett now. He's the man, and I know it! No guessin' about it this time."

"What's up?"

It was a voice at Harry's elbow.

Harry looked, and there was Silent Seth, in one of his most clever disguises.

"The jig is up, that's what, for this time," Harry answered. "Did you see 'em?"

"See who—what?"

"The doubles."

"No."

"Well, I did, but now I don't. They came in here just the same as that other time, and then they went off into air again."

"Get out! you're dreaming!"

"Don't you s'pose I know what I'm talkin' about?"

"But, I was right in there, and was lookin' to see who entered—was lookin' this way all the time. I didn't see 'em."

"Neither did I, after they had gone. Seth, the Old Boy is at the bottom of this business, sure as you are born. Have ye seen the boss?"

"No; guess he hasn't got around yet."

"Well, I'm out of a job, now, so I might as well sit down and suck my finger, I s'pose. I have let my man get away from me."

"It's the queerest thing on ice, this is, Harry. There is something uncanny about the way they disappear, and no discounting that. Wish the boss could see it for himself."

"So do I. But, it won't do for us to stand here talking; you go in again and take your place, and I'll hang around out here and wait for the boss to come. I want to tell him what I know so's he will be on his guard to know how to deal with 'em all around."

Seth went back into the place, while Harry sauntered out from the outer part to the street.

"I'm a good-for-nothin' at this business," he complained bitterly to himself. "I've got a notion to go and 'ply for a job at washin' dishes in some cheap hash-mill. I think my stoopenjus intelleck would about fill that bill nicely. I'll never make a detective, that is sure, and as fer winnin' the confidence of the super—well, there's no hope of it."

Seth, on returning, looked around the interior of the "garden" closely, trying to find the tall, dark man, but to no purpose: the man simply was not there.

"It is a deep mystery," the boy mused. "I can't doubt Harry's word about it, for I know how it was the first time; but, the question is, where are the men? If they are real flesh and blood, they can't melt off into air, that is out of the question; and if they ain't flesh and blood, then they must be spooks, that is all. Now ye see 'em and now de don't. Presto! and they're gone. But, the boss will bring 'em down 'fore he's done with 'em."

Having taken a seat, he waited for something to turn up.

In the mean time Harry was stationed a little way from the "garden," on that side from which he expected Billy to come, and finally he saw his chief coming.

Harry walked to the corner, and as Billy came up he gave him a signal, and together they turned down the side street.

"What is it?" Billy inquired.

"I have followed the man here," Harry answered.

"Did you see him actually come out of the Vienett house this time?"

"Yes, I have got it on him this time, dead sure. But, I have lost him again, and that's the worst of it all."

"Lost him! I thought you said he was here."

"I said I followed him here, but here he met t'other fellow, and they disappeared just the same as they did the other time."

"There is some trick about that, though I can't understand what it can be. But, you have done good work, for now we know the kind of man we are dealing with. He is a perfect actor."

"Yes, I should say he was. What shall I do now, boss?"

"Go into the garden ahead of me, but do not go where Seth is, and wait for whatever turns up for you to do. If it is impossible for me to direct you, direct yourself. Your judgment is good in almost every case, so take hold where you see a little help is needed."

"All right, boss, reckon I can run the whole thing into the ground that way as well as any other."

So they parted, and Harry stepped out upon the avenue and returned to the "garden," where he entered, looking around to see where Seth was in order not to seat himself too near him.

What was his surprise, as he looked, to see at one of the tables the tall, dark man whom he had so recently been shadowing!

At the same time he felt a tug at his sleeve.

Looking, he saw it was Seth, and stopped to exchange a word or two with him before going further.

"Where did he come from?" he asked.

"Just came in a minute ago," Seth answered.

"It is Vienett, sure enough."

"Oh, yes; no mistaking him—unless it's his double."

"Boss will be in shortly. I'll mosey off here by myself. It's a go-as-you-please, now."

It was a little later when Broadway Billy entered the place, and in the outward part of the gilded palace he was met by the very man he desired to see—Paul Vienett himself.

"Do I mistake?" the man asked, as if half afraid he was addressing the wrong person.

"That depends on whom you take me to be," Billy answered, speaking in his natural tone so that the man might take that for his clue, if he was the real Paul Vienett.

"It's all right," the man said quickly, then. "Come this way."

He put his hand on Billy's elbow and gently urged him forward toward the interior, but in the same moment a remarkable thing happened.

The walls of the building seemed suddenly to close in upon them, and they were standing in a narrow, half-lighted passage! The next instant Billy was roughly seized by strong hands.

It had all happened so quickly, and it had all come so unlooked-for, that he had had no time to think of resisting.

The next he knew a something was tightening around his neck, and he was dragged backward and downward, choking.

He realized that he had fallen into the hands of the stranglers!

Of this Happy Harry and Silent Seth were entirely ignorant, as they were unable to see from where they sat, the peculiar arrangement of great mirrors closing in their field of vision.

Harry had taken a seat quite close to Paul Vienett—if it was he.

Ere long another man sauntered in, looked leisurely around the garden, and seeing Vienett, approached him.

"Well, it's all right," he remarked.

"Found the man, have you, then?"
 "Yes, he is found. Come with me."
 "All right; lead the way."

Vienett rose and followed his guide out, passing between two of the mirrors, and Happy Harry followed, a second later.

Silent Seth did not go after them, believing Harry could do all that was to be done, and feeling that his business was there. His part to play had not yet come.

Harry was scarcely a half-dozen paces behind the two men, yet, upon reaching the outer part of the room, great was his amazement to find they had disappeared!

They had not had time to reach the street, that he knew, unless they had covered the distance in a single leap.

He ran to the entrances and looked out. They were gone, wholly and mysteriously gone.

"Christopher Columbus!" the wonder-stricken youth gasped. "Where is this business going to end? First thing I know I won't know anything, and then what a fix I'll be in! Wonder where the boss is? Crackers and cheese! I hope nothin' like this has happened to him!"

He started to go back to apprise Seth of what had happened, when suddenly the tall, dark man appeared before him, touched his arm, and in a whisper bade him follow him. Harry hesitated a second, and in that second the room seemed to revolve around him and he was suddenly seized and borne along a narrow passage and down a stairs!

CHAPTER XII.

SILENT SETH STAGGERED.

THE time wore on, and Silent Seth at last grew impatient of waiting.

He had kept close watch for Broadway Billy, but he had not put in an appearance yet.

Nor had anything further been seen of the tall, dark man. What it all meant, the Silent Shadower could not understand. It must be that Billy had been led off upon some other scent.

What to do Seth hardly knew, but, since he had been told to wait there he felt it his duty to stick at his post.

This he resolved to do, and finally his patience was rewarded.

The two tall, dark men entered the garden together, and together sat down at one of the tables.

Seth could now note that both were dressed exactly alike in every particular, and it would have been simply impossible to tell one from the other. They drew not a little attention.

It was plain, to the mind of the detective apprentice, that these were Paul Vienett and his double, but which was the true Paul he could not have told had his life depended on the test. Two pins could not be more alike than these two men were like each other.

They talked and sipped wine together, and Seth was too far away to hear anything they said.

While they were thus engaged men came up now and then and spoke to them, shaking hands with either one, and after a word or two had been exchanged, passed on.

Seth noticed, finally, one peculiarity about these men, and that was, that all had on hats of the same odd pattern; and, as luck would have it, he himself had on one of the same style. It was an odd style that had been the rage some years before, but had now nearly disappeared.

After speaking with the tall, dark men, these fellows retired to one corner of the "garden," where Seth noticed they all remained grouped together, talking among themselves.

"Here's something," Seth told himself. "This is no common incident; it is full of meaning of some sort or other. I wonder what? I've a notion to go over and mingle

with them and learn what I can—yes, and I'll do it, too; I'm not going to gain anything by sitting here."

Getting up from his place he strolled over to where the men were grouped, and as he came up with them one demanded:

"Lead, or assist?"

Seth knew not what this meant, or what to say in response, but he knew full well that he must speak quickly, something, so he answered:

"Assist."

The man offered his hand, and Seth shook hands with him.

"Didn't know you was one of us," the man said further, "but thought you must be. You are new, ain't you?"

"Yes, I'm new," Seth thought it best to agree with him.

That was all they said to him, and his footing seemed to be established with these men, whoever they were.

"The captain is late to-night," one presently remarked.

"Yes," from another. "And he was wanted to be on hand, too. Guess the Dark Brothers are waitin' for him."

Here was something which Silent Seth picked up quickly.

According to this, the tall, dark men were brothers, and no doubt they were twins. This would account for their resemblance in looks.

They were well named, too, he could not help owning. Here would be something for him to tell Broadway Billy, as soon as he saw him. It would be proof enough that Paul was not the innocent he had pretended to be.

"Yes, they're waitin' for him," another put in. "And, there's something big on hand, too."

"What is it?"

"Give it up; but, they are in sober earnest about somethin', you can see that for yourself. Somethin' is in the wind, or they wouldn't want us all together, would they?"

"That's so."

Seth kept his ears wide open, but had little or nothing to say, speaking only when spoken to.

And, what he had heard gave him something of a cue for his replies, a cue which he made the best use of, not tripping himself once.

Little notice was taken of himself, however, for his connection with their band, if band it was, seemed to be taken for granted. His answer to the last question had set him right.

Presently the word was passed that their captain was coming.

Seth looked, with the others, and saw a short, thick-set fellow coming down through the room from the entrance.

There was nothing in particular about him to draw attention, but he had on one of the peculiar hats, like all the others. He stopped at the table where the Dark Brothers sat.

There he stopped for a few moments, then came on and joined the group in the corner.

"I'm a little late, boys," he spoke. "Come on, now, but not all at once so as to draw attention."

He passed on, going out by a rear side door, which he left slightly open after him.

By ones and twos the others went out, at intervals of a few moments.

When the man who had first spoken to Silent Seth started to go, Seth went along with him, or just behind him so that he could follow where he led.

Seth realized that he might be walking into a death-trap, for aught he knew, but he knew also that he was there to learn all he could about these Dark Brothers, as he had heard them called.

He was not lacking in bravery.

Following the man out the door, he was led a few steps along a narrow hall, when a

sudden turn was made and a flight of stairs descended.

At the bottom was a small square landing, with a door that opened into a room containing several pool tables, and the place had all the appearance of a pool-room in connection with the "garden" above.

When Seth first saw this he thought he had not made much of a discovery in following these men, who, undoubtedly, belonged to some social club or organization, who had come down here for a friendly contest at pool. On seeing that they paid no interest to the tables, however, that thought faded.

Their captain, as they had called him, was standing at one side of the room, and near him the men were gathering.

Seth followed his leader over to the group, and managed to get partly behind the others.

Others came down, at intervals, and finally all were assembled.

"What's on the carpet for to-night, Captain Choker?" one man made bold to ask, as no one had yet spoken out aloud.

"We'll wait for the Dark Brothers, before we talk about it," the captain replied.

"They will be down in a few minutes. Some of you get around the pool tables, and pretend to be playing."

This order was obeyed, and Seth saw through the scheme.

These tables were there only to blind the police, in case a descent should ever be made and this room be discovered. So, at any rate, the Silent Shadower divined it.

Seth kept an eye on the door at the bottom of the stairs, awaiting the appearance of the Dark Brothers, but he looked for them in vain, there.

He heard them mentioned, presently, and looking saw them coming from the other side of the room.

They had come down by some other way! "Serious work is before us, good friends," spoke one of them.

"What is it?" demanded Captain Choker, as he was called. "A big haul to be made?"

"No; but, we have got to disband here and now, for a time, or else put out of our way one of the keenest detectives this city ever saw."

"That's soon decided on," was the cry.

"Who is he?" from the captain.

"Broadway Billy, the prince of metropolitan ferrets."

"Get out! Is it a fact that at last that infernal young terror has been nabbed?"

"It is; and not only be, but one of his boy ferrets as well. And the other will be, shortly, for the office is being watched, and as soon as he appears there he is ours."

Silent Seth could hardly believe the evidence of his ears.

Could it be possible that Broadway Billy and Happy Harry were in the hands of these men?

If so, how was it that he had escaped their notice? Harry had spoken to him twice that evening. But, it may have been before the men had begun to assemble in the "garden" above.

The men had to speak loud, there, for the music and noise of many feet overhead drowned their voices otherwise.

"Where is he?" demanded Captain Choker.

"We have him safe in the coal-hole under the sidewalk," was the response. "What is to be done with him?"

"Why, we'll choke him off, of course."

This raised a laugh.

"That is what we thought you would decide to do, boys, so we leave him in your hands. You have plenty of time to have a little fun with him first, if you want to do that."

"Won't you stay and see it?"

"No, for we have other important work elsewhere. We leave him to you, Captain Choker. You will know what to do when

you are done with him. But, be careful, you know, be careful."

"Little need to caution me, Dark Brothers."

With that the two tall, dark men turned and went from the room, and the others were left to take their vengeance upon Broadway Billy.

Silent Seth was almost in a perspiration with suppressed excitement. It was for him to rescue his master and clever fellow-apprentice, but how was he going to accomplish it?

He was certainly placed in a trying position, and one in which the slightest false move might prove disastrous. But, he was cool and nervy, and that was half the victory already. He could only await and take advantage of circumstances.

CHAPTER XIII.

BILLY AND HARRY ESCAPE.

"WONDER what the Dark Brothers are up to?" one man of the band ventured to question, when the two had gone.

"We need not trouble our heads about that," Captain Choker reproved him for his curiosity. "We'll attend to our own business, and we'll have enough to do."

"All right, let's be 'tendin' to it, then," sung out another.

"Bring out the prisoner," from a third.

"Yes, we'll bring him out, for this is just such a chance as I have wanted to get at him. He has been a terror to many a good fellow, and now it's about time we paid him back for it."

"Shall we mask?"

"Certainly, for there is no telling what might turn up afterward, you know. There is many a slip—and so forth. Yes, bring out the gowns and masks, and we'll meet him in full dress."

One of the men unlocked and opened a closet at one side of the room, where a great array of gowns was seen, together with red masks in great number.

These he threw out upon one of the pool-tables, and the men stepped forward and began to don them, Silent Seth among the rest, glad of the opportunity to further conceal his identity.

The gowns were black, reaching to the floor, and with the red masks on, it was impossible for the men to know one another.

On the front of each gown was what was probably intended to represent a coiled serpent.

On the gown of the captain this figure was doubled.

The door at the foot of the stairway had been locked and bolted, meanwhile, and now the pool tables were shoved back against the walls and the middle of the floor thus cleared.

Seats were then arranged, with a large chair for the use of the captain, on a platform at the head of the room—it had the appearance of having been intended for a lodge-room at some time or other, and there he with the double device on his gown took his station.

With their gowns the band had assumed a different manner of speech and address.

"Men of the Secret Circle," spoke the captain, "we are now ready to try the case of Billy Weston, the young prince of detectives. Bring him forth."

About half a dozen of the maskers, Silent Seth of the number, started at once to carry out this order, Seth letting the others have preference over him in the matter of taking the lead.

He had a double object in view. He wanted to whisper a word to his chief, if possible; and then, too, he wanted to learn all he could about the place he was in.

Meanwhile, how had it fared with Broadway Billy and Happy Harry?

When Billy came to, for he had been

rendered insensible by the garrote that had been applied to him, he found himself lying bound and gagged upon a heap of coal in a dismal place.

It took him only a moment to gather his thoughts, and he knew where he was and all that had happened.

He was in the hands of Paul Vienett, the greatest and most artful rascal with whom he had dealings. It was probable that his life would be taken. Perhaps they had left him there for dead.

Running the matter over in his mind, he could not blame himself for what had happened.

He would have pursued the same course again, seeing things in the same light as before. He had been simply overreached, that was all.

But, he was in a desperate situation, and wondered if either of his boys had seen him, and if they would go to the police for help before it was too late. While he was there, helpless, Paul Vienett might make his escape.

While reflecting thus he heard steps on the hard floor without, together with voices, and something like a brief struggle.

This ceased, and the steps died away.

Then, presently, other steps approached, and he caught a voice that made his heart sink to zero.

"Christopher Columbia!" was the exclamation that came to him. "What are ye tryin' ter do, anyhow? What do ye mean by such work as this?"

"Shall we garrote him, here and now?" another voice.

"No; we'll bind him for the present."

"Better go slow!" their victim gave warning. "You'll stir up a nest of hornets that will make it warm for ye, if ye don't look out, *that's* what I'm telling ye. You had better go—go—"

But that was all, as a gag closed his mouth.

The door of the coal hole opened, then, and the boy was pitched in upon the heap of black diamonds not far from his chief.

Having done their work securely in both cases, the rascals paid no further attention to the prisoners, but closed the door and went away, leaving them there helpless together.

No sooner had they passed out of hearing, though, than Broadway Billy rolled over in the direction of his boy companion in the toils.

And having reached him, he placed himself back to back with him and with his fingers began to try to undo the bonds which held his faithful little apprentice so securely.

Billy had been in just such fixes as this before, and had got out again by this means.

It was slow, hard work, for Billy himself was so tightly bound that he could just move his fingers in a cramped way, but no more. Harry held perfectly still, and pressed his hands tight together to make the cords as loose as possible.

Time passed, but Billy did not give up, though he had to rest his tired fingers many times.

At last the victory was his; one of the knots gave way, and Harry's hands were freed; after which the rest was easy enough.

Harry took a knife from his pocket, as soon as he had the use of his hands to do so, and in a few moments after that both he and his chief had full use of their limbs and tongues.

"Christopher Columbia!" Harry cried in whisper, "but we *are* in a pickle, fer sure, boss! How did they get hold of you?"

"I hardly know, Harry," was Billy's reply. "We have run up against a big snag this time, sure enough."

"I guess you are right."

"How came you to get into their hands?"

"Give it up. It was presto, change! and here I was."

"Know who it was trapped you?"

"Paul Vienett."

"And it was he who tricked me, too, *or* his double—and it is hard to tell one from the other. But, there is no longer any doubt about Paul's guilt, and as soon as I get out of here I'll go for him."

"If he hasn't lit out."

"Yes, if he hasn't flown, that's so. But, now to get out; and it is probable it will be easier said than done."

The place they were in was long and narrow—their eyes having long since become accustomed to the darkness they could see around. The little light that came to them came from above, through the glass-set manhole.

The place was more than two-thirds full of coal, and they could touch the cold flagstones overhead anywhere, and the manhole presented to them an easy means of escape, provided they could raise it. First, however, Billy tried the door to see if it was secured.

It was fastened on the outside, and escape that way was out of the question, it seemed.

He next turned to the manhole.

The cover to it, he found, was attached to four iron supports, to serve as a guard against any person's falling into the hole when it was open, and taking hold of these he tried his strength to see if he could lift it.

Yes, he could; but, for the present at least, he waited to think, for the stream of people passing overhead was great.

Would it pay to be seen getting out that way?

He was armed, as was Harry, too, and he had little fear of waiting and facing his foes, now, if anything was to be gained.

It did not take him long to make up his mind, and telling Harry to take hold with him they together lifted the manhole cover from its place, unable to give warning to the passers-by.

Just as they lifted it a big German was passing, and his toe catching under it he went headlong to the sidewalk with a heavy fall.

"Shimminy!" he exploded as he came down. "Who done dot mit me! I just like to know!"

The crowd laughed, and in a minute a hundred persons were gathered around.

Billy and Harry pushed the cover on up, and secured it.

By this time the big German had picked himself up, and was taking his cane in hand in a businesslike manner.

"V'at vor you done dat?" he cried, as Billy showed his face at the opening. "By shimminy but I got a goot notion to break your koph mit you! V'at vor you pring dot ding down on mine voot?"

"Why don't you look where you're going?" asked Billy. "I couldn't see you, from down here, could I?"

"By shimminy, but I made you see some-dings, maype!"

The big German was mad enough to do anything desperate, almost, and Billy saw he would have to pacify him before he could get out.

"Well, uncle, I didn't go to do it, you know," he said. "You are not much hurt, anyhow, and you will feel good in a minute or two. It was one of the accidents no one could help."

"I vas almost proke in two py der middle, all der same, anyhow, maype, ain't id!" the German stormed.

"Oh! you are worth a dozen dead men yet, I'll make it all right when I get out." A couple of minutes had been wasted, and a policeman had come up to see what was drawing such a crowd to that particular spot.

"What are you doing in there, anyhow?" he now demanded.

"Business, copper," Billy responded. "Lend a hand, will you, and help me and my partner out?"

"You're rather lippy, I think," the policeman rejoined. "I think I'll inquire what you are doing coming out of there at this time of evening. Yes, I'll help you and hold you, too."

He gave Billy his hand, and the young detective prince was soon out upon the upper crust once again.

Harry was next helped out, and it was then that Billy gave the policeman a glimpse of his badge, at the same time telling who he was, and he and Harry were allowed to depart, which they did immediately.

CHAPTER XIV.

SETH SLOPES—THE CLOSING IN.

BILLY had put the cover to the manhole back to its place before starting off, and as soon as he and Harry were gone the crowd dispersed, the big German limping as he took himself away, grumbling something to the effect that American citizens ought to rebel.

Inside the Golden Garden this little incident was hardly known, and in two minutes it had been forgotten by all who had figured in the crowd.

Barely had the crowd above gone, when the half a dozen or so of masked fellows arrived at the door of the coal hole.

They found it hooked and bolted, and were unprepared for the surprise that awaited them. They supposed, of course, their prisoners were safely there, as they had been told.

A jet of gas was lighted outside the door, and then the door was opened and the men stepped in.

"Why, there's no prisoners here," said the foremost.

"Not there!" cried another. "They must be there."

"But, they ain't, I tell ye, unless I'm blind in one eye and can't see out of the other."

"Maybe they are further back."

"Easy to prove that, just light another gas here and we'll see."

The heart of the Silent Shadower was beating high. He hoped it was true that Billy and Harry had got away.

The gas was lighted, and the instant the flame sprung up it was plain that the prisoners were gone. Their cut bonds were there, and the way of their escape was guessed instantly.

"They might 'a' knowed it," growled one of the maskers. "Might 'a' knowed they couldn't hold Broadway Billy with anything short o' irons and chains. He is a holy terror, is that fellow, and I think it's time fer some of us ter be scarce; what say to that?"

"He can't know anything 'bout us."

"But, he knows where it was he got into trouble, don't he?"

"What good will it do him? We'll all swear it ain't so, and if they search the place what will they find?"

"An' mebbey that's what they'll do; we'd better get back and report soon as possible. They are gone, and that settles it; so, come on."

This speaker turned out the gas as he said this, and started back the way he had come.

The others followed, one turning out the other jet that had been lighted, and in a few seconds they were back again in the room from which they had started.

"Where is the prisoner?" asked he of the double device—the captain.

"He's give us the slip," he was told.

"Escaped?"

"Nothin' else. Him and his boy got off their binders, somehow, and got up and out through the manhole."

"Perdition! Then there may be a raid here in no time. Hustle around, all of you, and get things in shipshape here. Get the tables in place, and play pool for all you're worth."

There was a lively unmasking, then, and

the things were put away with more haste than they had been brought out.

The pool tables were put into position, all the gas lighted, and games were begun at each table.

All the extra bolts and fastenings were removed from the doors, and there did not appear to be anything out of usual about the room. The way to the "garden" above was left open and lighted.

Some of the men had gone out toward the front, where the prisoners had escaped from, while others went up to the room above, and among these Captain Choker and Silent Seth, the latter glad for the chance to get so much nearer to the open street once again.

Just as they came out into the large concert room, the captain of the band turned to speak to the man behind him, and Seth happened to be right at his heels.

"I'll tell you what I think," the captain started to say, and then he stopped short.

"Who the deuce are you, anyhow?" he demanded.

There was only one thing Seth could respond, with any degree of safety, and he had to resort to that. He remembered the question that had been asked him when he first mingled with the men of the peculiar hats.

"I assist," he said, promptly.

"Well, I never saw you before, did I?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. You ought to know. See my hat, don't you?"

"Yes, but hang me if I know your face. Who was it put you on the force? I didn't, I'll swear."

"It was the Dark Brothers, sir."

"And have you been doing work?"

"No, not yet."

"And where are you going now?"

"I don't know; I'm ready for orders any time."

"See here, I don't know what to make of you," the captain declared. "You talk straight, and yet you don't. Come over here and sit down while we wait for the Dark Brothers, and I'll see what you can tell me. When were you initiated?"

"Never been put through yet," Seth answered, fearlessly.

"And yet you were down-stairs!"

"Yes."

"Then I think we'll begin to put you through. Who was it asked you down to the other room?"

"One of the fellows; I don't know his name."

"You'd know him again?"

"Yes."

"All right, come, and we'll go down there, and you can point him out to me."

"Not right away, I guess," Seth objected, as lazily as possible. "If the police are likely to swoop down here I think I'd rather take my chances up here in the general room."

"You are a cool one, I must say."

"That's what my folks think, sir. Just wait a moment, will you, till I step out there and speak to that fellow?"

"What fellow?"

"Watch me and you'll see."

Seth had already started, and he walked leisurely across the room as if he had some person in view, but he had only a scheme for escape in his mind.

When he came to the broad passage that ran down the center of the room, he headed straight for a table that was half way between that point and the door, making a sign with his hand as if greeting some one.

As he came to the table, though, and being then near the entrance, he quickened his pace, and the next moment was gone!

Captain Choker had been watching him, and as he saw this trick an oath leaped to his lips and he sprung from his chair.

He hastened to the front, and out, but by the time he got to the street the mysterious youth was out of sight.

"Curse him, I wonder who he was?" the captain muttered. "Why didn't I take him by the neck and drag him down-stairs at the first suspicion? What if he was one of Broadway Billy's whelps? But, no; that's impossible; he wouldn't have had the nerve to play such a game. Besides, how could he get onto us? Still, what—I'll ask the Dark Brothers at first sight."

He turned back into the "garden" and talked with some of his men.

Meanwhile, Seth had dodged around a corner, and was making haste to get out of the neighborhood.

He had gone a short distance when he met his chief and Happy Harry coming back toward the "garden," now in a different disguises, Seth recognizing them from the fact that he had seen them in the same disguises many times.

So they too recognized him.

Hasty explanations were exchanged, Billy listening to the story Seth had to tell with closest attention.

"I begin to see through it, now," he said. "It is a regular band of stranglers, of which the two Vienetts are at the head. They are probably twin brothers, one of whom has been playing the innocent as a shield for both. Their game is about at an end, I'm thinking."

"What shall you do?" asked Seth.

"I'm going to see that Paul Vienett is arrested as soon as he comes home. I go at once to prepare for that."

"And what about us?"

"You go and put on another disguise, as Harry has done, and come back to the Golden Garden and wait there for the Dark Brothers. You need not go in, not really necessary to run that danger, but keep good watch, and if they come out, follow them and don't lose them. If they go in, wait and watch and be sure they do not come out and you not see them."

"What if they disappear again?" asked Seth.

"That trick is simple, and I understand it, now. If that is done, stay and watch just the same. Harry can tell you about that disappearing business. Take care what you do, now."

With some further exchange of words the chief and his aides parted, Billy setting forth for Headquarters, leaving Harry and Seth to follow the orders they had received.

When Billy reached Headquarters he made himself known to the captain in charge.

"I want the inspector, right away," he said. "Can you send for him?"

"Yes, guess so; what is going on, Billy?"

"Want him to make an arrest. That Hayzley case is coming to a focus. Have got the dead-wood on Vienett!"

"That so? Then I'll summon the inspector in haste. He left orders to do so if anything new came up in the matter. He'll be glad to hear of this, you can bet!"

Billy waited for the inspector and told his story, when the inspector and three policemen set out for the residence of the arch rascal whom they were now resolved upon taking, having proof sufficient, as they believed.

But, strange things were yet to appear, something which no one had the slightest inkling of. And Broadway Billy, when he returned to the Golden Garden, with policemen under his charge, was going to make a richer haul and "scoop in" bigger game than he had thought was in the field.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SUCCESSFUL RAID.

WHEN the inspector and his men reached the home of Paul Vienett there were lights in the hall and front room.

Their ring at the bell brought the master of the house in person, the hour being late and the servants having been allowed to retire for the night.

At sight of the inspector and the police-

men with him, the tall, dark man became a degree lighter, as the blood receded from his face, and it could be seen that he guessed what it meant.

The inspector and his men stepped promptly in, and hands were laid upon the shoulders of the suspected man.

"Paul Vienett, you are my prisoner!" the inspector said.

"For what am I arrested?" the prisoner asked, as calmly as he could under the circumstances.

"You are arrested for the murder of Charles Hayzley, and also on the charge of being at the head of stranglers in this city."

"Impossible!" the man gasped. "I am innocent of both, sir; I swear it! I am the victim of a foul conspiracy—it must be so. Who is it makes such a charge against me?"

"These pretensions will not serve you longer, sir," the inspector said sternly. "You were followed this evening when you left this house by the area door, and all is known to the police. It is useless for you to deny further, for—"

"You astound me, sir!" the man interrupted. "I have not left this house by the area door in five years, that I am aware of. You have been misinformed; of that there can be no doubt. I am wrongfully accused. I am an innocent man; before God I swear it—"

"There, there, do not say any more," the inspector stopped him. "You will be given ample opportunity to prove your innocence. Give me your hands, for you must be handcuffed."

The policemen held the man's wrists, and the handcuffs were put on.

Just then a fair woman appeared on the scene, clad in a loose wrap which she had evidently donned in haste.

"Good heavens! What means this?" she gasped. "My husband a prisoner! Oh! Paul! What does it mean?"

"I am arrested for murder, a crime of which I am as innocent as are you, my darling. Fear not, for it will come out all right. I expected it, but I did not tell you anything about it, hoping it might not come to this. Bear up, and do not for a moment fear."

The woman wrung her hands, in her extreme excitement, staring blankly at the officers and her handcuffed husband.

"Gentlemen, you cannot know what you are doing," she gasped. "My husband is the best of men—I know him as no other could know him. This is some terrible mistake you have made. Please do not take him from me! Please do not bring this disgrace upon him. Oh! Paul! Can you not clear yourself?"

The inspector admired the woman for her acting. He believed this to be a part of the scheme as a whole, and she was playing her part to perfection.

"Alas! I cannot clear myself now, darling," the prisoner responded. "But, do not grieve; it will all come out right. Be calm and bear up. Return to your room and compose yourself to appear in my behalf at my examination to-morrow."

With a cry the woman covered her face with her hands, and ran sobbing up the stairs.

The prisoner sighed heavily, but spoke no further word.

"Take him to Headquarters," the inspector ordered two of his men. "I will take a look around these premises before I leave."

So the prisoners were led away, and when he had gone the inspector and the remaining policeman descended to the basement floor to search around, with an object in view.

As the man had been seen to come out from the area door, when he went to the Golden Garden, it was inferred that if he had any tools or implements of a questionable character they were to be found somewhere in hiding down there. Otherwise he would have left by the front door.

A thorough search was made, and it was rewarded. In a dark corner of the coal cellar were found some burglar tools, together with a slender silken rope—perhaps the very garrote that had strangled Charles Hayzley.

When they went up to the hall again they found the fair woman there dressed for the street.

"Have you found anything?" she calmly asked.

"Yes, we have found these," the inspector answered, displaying the things. "Enough to send our prisoner to the death chair, madam!"

With a wild scream the woman threw up her arms and fell in a faint, and only for the policeman springing forward and catching her, would have struck her head with force.

The servants had by this time all put in their appearance, and turning their mistress over to them, and leaving the policeman in charge of the house that nothing might be removed, the inspector took his leave, returning to Headquarters where he expected to overwhelm his prisoner with the discoveries he had made.

In the mean time Happy Harry and Silent Seth had perfected their disguises and returned to their post at the Golden Garden.

They had drawn lots to see who should venture inside to learn whether their man was there, each being eager to take the risk, and the lot falling to Seth, he performed the duty quickly and well.

Neither of the tall, dark men was there, and so he reported when he rejoined Harry without.

"Not there," he said, "unless they are in the room below."

"And we'll find that out when the boss comes with the squad," said Harry.

"What is more," Seth added, "all the hats I told you about are gone. I did see some of the fellows, just the same."

"Then you'll be able to point them out when the raid is made. I tell you what, Silent Seth, we are stalking for tall game this time, and don't you forget it!"

They kept up a faithful watch, and at last were rewarded by seeing one of the tall, dark men come down the street and enter the gilded palace. And he seemed to be in eager haste, too.

"One, anyhow," said Harry.

"And he's looking for the other," added Seth.

The man had gone straight into the "garden," and after a few minutes reappeared in the outer part, where he paced up and down.

He had not been there a great while when his double came hurrying down the avenue, evidently greatly excited, and rushed into the place, where he was joined by his counterpart immediately.

Hurried words were spoken, when they started back toward the rear, and as they did so they suddenly merged into one person, and then as suddenly that one was gone, and the two young ferrets without were left to stare after them with eyes open to their widest!

"Christopher Columbia!" exclaimed Harry. "Don't it beat the spread eagle! A fellow can't see how it's done, hardly, even when he knows the trick."

"I am not so sure that we really do know the trick," declared Seth. "If it's what you say, then it's perfection, that's all."

"And that's what it is, sure enough. I've been through the mill, and so has the boss."

It was only a minute later when Broadway Billy and a police captain, with about twenty officers, came to the scene.

Harry and Seth immediately reported the situation, and when Billy had conferred for a moment with the captain, the de-

scent upon the questionable place was set in motion.

The police captain, with Silent Seth, went boldly in, accompanied by half a dozen officers.

Broadway Billy remained in the outer part, at the point where the mysterious disappearance had occurred, with two policemen at his back, each armed with a revolver.

The other policemen were stationed along across the entrances, inside, and were ready to bring to a stop any man who attempted to pass them, while Happy Harry was left outside with directions to follow the tall, dark man if one of the pair happened to get away.

In a few seconds all was excitement in the place. The inmates tried to get out, but the policemen held them at bay until the "wanted" man could be picked out from among them and secured.

Billy and the policemen at his back stood waiting and watching at a place where two of the great mirrors came together like a wedge, their weapons ready for instant use.

Suddenly the two mirrors parted, without a sound, and out leaped one of the tall, dark men, the other following right at his heels, and the mirrors swung back to place as silently as they had parted!

The faces of the two rascals paled, when they saw the gleaming weapons aimed at their heads, and before either could take action Broadway Billy had a pair of handcuffs on one of them.

The other seeing that he must fight if he would escape, aimed a blow at the head of the young prince of detectives, which, however, Billy was quick enough to dodge, and in the same instant he grappled with the fellow.

As he did this—the handcuffed man tried to escape.

"No you don't!" cried one of the policemen, laying hold upon his collar and jerking him back. "We'll take care of you, sir. Lend the boy a hand, Denny," to his fellow officer.

But, Broadway Billy needed little help, for, strong young fellow that he was, he was a match for his opponent, and in a moment more had him handcuffed.

Hardly had he done so when the mirror parted again, and out sprang Captain Choker.

They were ready for him, too, and he was taken before he could guess what had happened, almost. He however, was a powerful man, and it required the combined strength of Billy and a policeman to overcome him.

By this time the work of the captain and the other men was about done, but Billy signaled to Happy Harry and both dashed inside to lend aid if it was needed. Two or three arrests were made, then the cordon was withdrawn from the entrance and the rest of the crowd was allowed to go out.

Policemen were left in charge, while others set out for Headquarters with their prisoners, under charge of the captain; Broadway Billy and his team hastening on in advance to apprise the inspector of the result of the raid.

CHAPTER XVI.

AMAZEMENT—CONCLUSION.

"WELL, we have got there with both feet," Billy Weston cried, joyfully, as he entered the office, finding the inspector on hand.

"And so have I," was the pleased response. "Did you get the double, Billy?"

"Did I get the double?" Billy asked, puzzled. "I got both of them, and I'll vow you can't tell one from the other. But, what did your question mean? What are you staring at?"

The inspector was looking at the young detective in bewilderment.

"I don't understand you," he declared. "You say you have got *both* of them, and that they both look exactly alike; and yet it is pretty certain that my own prisoner has not got away from me. What are you driving at, anyhow, Weston?"

"Your own prisoner?" echoed Billy. "What are you driving at, inspector?"

"Why, I went to Paul Vienett's house and arrested him, and have got the best of proof that he is the right man. Look here, what was found in his house!"

He displayed the garrote and the burglar tools!

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy gave way to his old time exclamation. "You had him, sure enough, but it is plain that he has got away from you, for I have just arrested both him and his double at the Golden Garden. They'll be here in a few minutes, in charge of the officers, and you'll see for yourself."

"Why, it's next to impossible!" asserted the inspector, though his face was now sober enough. "I'll find out about it in a minute!"

He touched a bell and a sergeant stepped promptly in.

"Have that prisoner brought back here immediately," the inspector ordered.

The sergeant saluted and withdrew, and the inspector leaned back in his chair to await the result.

While they waited many feet were heard entering the building, and in the office trooped the police captain and his men, with their prisoners.

In the lead were the Dark Brothers, now more dark and scowling than ever before. At sight of them the inspector leaped to his feet, exclaiming in anger:

"You were right, Billy! Lucky you nabbed him again! The men who allowed him to get away shall have their buttons cut off the moment I learn who they were!"

"I was sure it could not be otherwise," averred Billy. "He came to the Golden Garden in haste and flurry, and that would account for it. But, I defy you to tell which of the two your prisoner was, inspector."

Just then the door opened again, and in came the sergeant and another officer with Paul Vienett between them!

"Sweet pertaters!"

"Christopher Columbia!"

And other exclamations of amazement were heard on every hand.

"Three of a kind!" observed Silent Seth, calmly.

Paul Vienett stared at his two doubles like one bereft of his senses. And from them looked blankly at the face of those around him, until his gaze rested upon the face of Broadway Billy, who was without his disguise, now.

The man's face lighted at once, and he cried:

"You have saved me, my friend! Do you believe now that I am innocent?"

"Yes, I do if I have any power left to believe anything," Billy promptly answered. "I am knocked clear out this time."

"What is the explanation of all this?" peremptorily demanded the inspector. "Can you explain anything of it, sir?" turning to the acknowledged Paul Vienett. "Who are these men who so resemble you?"

"I do not know, sir" was the apparently candid answer.

"Then it remains for you to explain it," turning upon the doubles. "Who and what are you?"

"If you can learn that, good; if not, you will never know from our lips," one answered, sullenly.

"We'll see about that, my fine fellow."

All questioning was useless. One man could not answer anything, or so he declared, and the other two would not.

That office had never witnessed a more novel and exciting scene, and the superin-

tendent was sent for, that he might try his hand at solving the riddle and bringing truth out of the tangled maze.

The three prisoners were seated in a row, and it would have been simply impossible for any one to have told two of them apart, the one from the other. The acknowledged Paul Vienett, however, on close scrutiny, showed softer facial lines and a higher degree of refinement than his counterparts.

When the superintendent came in he stared in wonder.

The situation was explained to him, all the particulars given, and he was left to decide the matter.

This, however, he did not attempt to do. He asked some questions, after which he sent the prisoners away with orders that they be locked up separately.

All the other prisoners, too, were taken care of properly, and the successful detectives and the police officials spent an hour in discussing the singular case in every light in which it could be presented.

There was further work to be done upon it, which was taken in hand by the keen and alert detectives and successfully carried out.

By the time the prisoners got their hearing, further discoveries had been made, and additional evidence was in hand.

Some Italian manuscripts had been brought to light, which, when translated, threw light upon the case and made it all clear.

These manuscripts contained the secret for which Charles Hayzley had undoubtedly been murdered; they were the papers that had been taken from the secret drawer in the table in his room. And by them the innocence of Paul Vienett was established.

The story told by the manuscripts, briefly stated, was this:

Paul Vienett, an honest man, had two brothers, but had never known it. The three were triplets, of Italian birth. He had been separated from the other two at an early age, and had been brought to New York by a rich uncle, his mother's brother, an honest gentleman.

The other two had been brought to the same city a few years later by their father, who was a rascal. These two were brought up in viciousness, and trained in rascality. The father, Pietro Vienett, had been a famous garroter in Rome, and he and the honest uncle who had taken charge of the boy Paul were bitterest foes. Pietro hated his brother-in-law because he was a better man than himself, and had often vowed to bring him to the dust.

Pietro had loved Miss Halcomb, and had been the rival of Charles Hayzley for her hand. Had represented himself as a single man, of good family, and as having a fortune. In fact, he was the knave we have pronounced him, and his wealth had come by the operations of the band of rascals of which he was the head. When Hayzley supplanted him he vowed vengeance, but failed to carry out his evil intentions in that direction. He made one attempt, but Hayzley being so powerful a man, he was foiled.

In that encounter the Italian lost some documents, which he never knew where or when he had lost, or how, though he knew it was possible that Hayzley might have them. As the Italian never came for the papers (Hayzley supposing he knew where they were), Hayzley kept them. And, after the death of Vienett he studied Italian enough to be able to read them. The papers told the story of the triplet brothers, as well as that of the Brothers of the Garrote, and so it was that the life of Charles Hayzley at least became endangered, when Pietro Junior and Antonio, the brothers to Paul, commenced the carrying out of the work of vengeance their father had left for them to perform.

The father had trained Antonio and Pietro in the use of the garrote, with which he himself was an "artist" and for his crimes had

been obliged to fly to America. On his deathbed he made known to the two sons that they had a brother, Paul, telling them (to gain further revenge upon the wife's brother) that the fortune Paul and his uncle held was rightfully theirs. At his death Antonio and Pietro became the head of the "Brothers," and were known as the Dark Brothers. It was they who had furnished the money for another member of the band to open the Golden Garden, wherein, under its protecting cover, they could ply their terrible trade. When they came to know that Charles Hayzley had their secret, they decided to kill him, but so planned the murder that suspicion might fall upon their brother, Paul.

Knowing the danger which threatened them from Charles Hayzley, the Dark Brothers had taken pains to make themselves known to him as Paul Vienett, and had given him warning not to tell what he knew. When he went to the police they knew of it, managed to learn his errand, and then resolved to put him out of the way that very night and throw the suspicion upon their unoffending brother if they could.

One of the brothers committed the crime, and remained in the room until it was broken open, when, in the semi-darkness he slipped out as the detective and the housekeeper entered, and without being seen. Nor did he leave the house then, but searched for the papers while all attention was being given to the room where the crime had been done. He did not find the papers, but did find a clue to the hidden drawer, and afterward he entered the room boldly and secured what he wanted.

At the examination Henry Jones and his daughter were present. The young woman was then asked to point out the man she had promised to marry. She was dismayed, and ran crying from the scene. Her mania for a foreign alliance had probably been cured.

The various points were brought out in full, for, seeing that their game was up, the imported villains told the particulars, hoping by that means to get off with slighter sentences.

Pietro had been the one Happy Harry had seen coming out of Paul's house by the area door, and was the man he had followed.

Antonio it was who robbed the broker's office. The rascals were the most daring the police had had to do with in many a day.

After what has been disclosed, particulars of the minor points need not be set forth. The reader can see everything clearly.

Paul Vienett of course was dismissed, and he could harbor no ill feelings against the detectives for the suspicion that had rested upon him. He did go to the "garden," as agreed with Broadway Billy, but there a man—pretending to be Billy, addressed him, and he was captured and taken home a prisoner. This story he had not told at once, wanting to keep it back until his trial.

The rascals were tried, and were duly sentenced, every one. The Golden Garden was broken up, its secrets laid bare, the Mystery of the Mirrors solved, and its influence for evil forever broken.

The press, naturally, greatly praised the work of Billy Weston and his team in bringing down their big game, but the young chief and his aides wore their honors modestly.

There they are, seldom without a "case," as might be expected, and usually such a case as the foregoing, demanding extra skill, courage and shadow resources in its conduct.

THE END.

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